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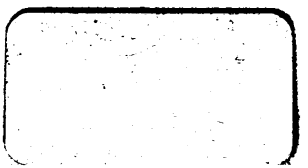

NAS
Hope, L.

A BULL CAME RUSHING THROUGH THE CORN.

Moving Picture Girls at Oak Farm. —*Page 54.*

The Moving Picture Girls at Oak Farm

OR

Queer Happenings While Taking Rural Plays

BY

LAURA LEE HOPE

AUTHOR OF "THE MOVING PICTURE GIRLS," "THE MOVING PICTURE GIRLS SNOWBOUND," "THE OUTDOOR GIRLS OF DEEPDALE," "THE BOBBSEY TWINS," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

THE WORLD SYNDICATE PUBLISHING CO.
CLEVELAND, O. NEW YORK, N. Y.

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THE COMMERCIAL BOOKBINDING CO.
CLEVELAND, O.

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THE MOVING PICTURE GIRLS AT OAK FARM

CHAPTER I

FILMING A SMASH

"ALL aboard for Oak Farm!"

"Are we all here; nobody missing?"

"What a relief to get out of the hot city, with summer coming on!"

"Yes, I'm so glad we can go!"

These were only a few of the expressions that came from a motley assemblage of persons as they stood in a train shed in Hoboken, one June morning. Motley indeed was the gathering, and more than one traveler paused to give a second look at the little group. Perhaps a brief list of them may not be out of place.

There were four pretty girls, two of the innocent type that can so easily forget their own good looks; two not so ingenuous, fully aware that they had certain charms, and anxious that they be given full credit for them.

Then there was a man, with rather long black hair, upon which perched, rather than fitted, a tall silk hat that had lost its first sheen. If ever "actor" was written in a man's make-up it was in the case of this personage. Beside him stood, attired much the same, but in garments that fitted him better, another who was obviously of the theater, as were the two girls who were so aware of their own good looks.

Add to this two or three young men, at least two of whom seemed to hover near the two girls who were innocently unaware of their beauty; a bustling gentleman who seemed nervous lest some of the party get lost, a motherly-looking woman, with two children who were here, there and everywhere; another man who looked as though all the milk and cream in the world had turned sour, and finally one on whose round German face there was a gladsome smile, which seemed perpetual— and you have the main characters.

No, there was one other—a genial man who seemed to be constantly trying to solve some puzzle, and taking pleasure in it.

And these personages were waiting for a train. That was evident. You might have puzzled over their occupation and destination, as many other travelers did, and the problem would not have been solved, perhaps, until you had a glimpse of the markings on their trunks. But when you

noted the words: "Comet Film Company," you understood.

"Oh, won't it be just delightful, Ruth!" exclaimed one of the younger girls.

"It certainly will, Alice. I'm just crazy to get out where I can gather new-laid eggs and know they are fresh!"

"Little housekeeper!" exclaimed the man standing beside the one who looked as though he dreamed of nothing else but "Hamlet."

"Well, Daddy dear, won't it be just fine to have fresh eggs?" demanded the one addressed as Ruth. "If Alice thinks it's easy to get them in the city——"

"Now Ruth DeVere, you know I was only chaffing!" exclaimed Alice. "But I don't believe you'll get much chance to gather eggs, Ruth."

"Why not?"

"Those two youngsters will claim that as one of their daily—chores—I believe they're called on a farm," and with laughing brown eyes she motioned to the boy and girl who, at that moment, were playing tag around the motherly-looking woman.

"Oh, yes, I suppose Tommy and Nellie will be after them," agreed Ruth. "But I can go with them."

"And jump off the beam in the barn down

into the hay! Won't that be fun!" cried Alice. "I haven't done that—not in years, when we went once to grandfather's farm. Oh, for a good jump into the fragrant hay!"

"Why, Alice, you wouldn't do that; would you?" asked Ruth, as she straightened her sailor.

"She may—and you may all have to!" spoke the man who seemed in charge of this odd theatrical company.

"How is that, Mr. Pertell?" asked Ruth.

"Well, you know we're going to make moving pictures of all sorts of rural scenes that will fit in the plays, and jumping into a haymow may be one of them," he laughed.

"I refuse to do any such foolishness as that!" broke in the tragic actor. "I have demeaned myself enough already in this farce and travesty of acting, and to jump into a haymow—ye gods! Never!" and he seemed to shudder.

"Oh, I guess you'll do it, Mr. Bunn, or give up your place to someone who will," said Mr. Frank Pertell, the manager, calmly.

The tragic actor sighed, and said nothing.

"Huh! Yes! Jumping around in barns! Some of us will break our arms or legs, that's certain!" exclaimed the man who looked as though all the world were sad. "I know some accident will happen to us yet."

"Oh, cheer up, Mr. Sneed. The worst is yet to come, Sir Knight of the Doleful Countenance!" exclaimed a fresh-faced young man who carried under his arm a small box, from which projected a handle and a small tube. The initiated would have known it at once as a camera for taking moving pictures. "It will be jolly out there at Oak Farm, I'm sure."

"That's right, Russ! Don't let Mr. Sneed get gloomy on such a fine day!" whispered Alice DeVere. "But when is our train coming?"

"It will be made up soon," Russ Dalwood answered. "Perhaps it is ready now. I'll go and inquire."

The two girls, before spoken of as being too well aware of their own good looks, were talking together at one side of the big concrete platform beneath the train shed. As they strolled about and talked, one of them, from time to time, applied a chamois to her already well-powdered nose, and took occasional glimpses of herself in the tiny mirror imbedded in the top of the box that contained her "beautifier." Occasionally the two would glance at Alice and Ruth, and make remarks.

"Train will soon be ready for us," announced Russ Dalwood, coming back to join the rest of the theatrical troupe which, instead of presenting

plays in a theater, posed for them before the clicking eye of the camera, the films later to be shown to thousands in the chain of moving picture playhouses which took the Comet Company's service. "We can go aboard in five minutes!" Russ added.

"That's good," sighed Ruth. "There's is nothing so tiresome as waiting. Which track will it be on, Russ?"

"Number thirteen!"

"What! Great Scott! Track thirteen! I'm not going!" cried Pepper Sneed, who had come to be known as the "grouch" of the company.

"Not going! Why not, I'd like to know?" demanded Mr. Pertell.

"Why—track thirteen—that's unlucky, you know. Something is sure to happen!"

"Well, as we have to get to Beatonville, where Oak Farm is located, and as this is the only road that goes there, I'm afraid we'll have to take that train, whether it's on track thirteen or not," declared Mr. Pertell. "Unless," he added with gentle sarcasm, "you can get the company to switch it to another track."

Mr. Sneed did not answer, but later Paul Ardite, who was one of the younger members of the company, saw the actor tieing a knot in his watch chain, and tossing a penny into a rubbish heap.

"What in the world are you doing that for?" demanded Paul.

"Trying to break the hoodoo!" exclaimed Mr. Sneed. "To start out to do new film work on track thirteen! Whew! That's terrible!"

But Paul only laughed.

"Now, is everyone here?" asked Mr. Pertell a little later, when a railroad man, through a megaphone, announced the make-up of the train.

"It seems so," remarked Mr. DeVere, who spoke in a hoarse and husky whisper, difficult to understand. In fact, as you will learn later, it was this affliction that had caused him to be acting for moving pictures instead of in the legitimate drama.

Mr. Pertell took a rapid survey of his little company, and then went off to make sure that the trunks containing the various costumes had been properly checked.

"Funny thing about Beatonville," remarked Russ to Ruth.

"Why so?" she asked.

"Oh, every time I inquired of the brakeman, or starter, where the train for that place left from, they'd laugh. I thought there must be some joke, and I asked about it."

"Was there?"

"Well, not much of one. It seems that Beatonville is about the last place in Jersey that any-

one ever heads for. I guess it must consist of the depot and one house—the one where the agent lives. There is only one train a day and the place is so lonesome, the starter said, that the engineer hates to stop there."

"Oh, well, we aren't going there for pleasure—we're going to work," put in Ruth. "Besides, Oak Farm isn't exactly in Beatonville; is it, Russ?"

"No, a few miles out, I believe. Well, it will be a rest for us after the rush of the city, anyhow."

"All aboard!" called a brakeman, and the Comet Film Company, bag and baggage, started for the train that was to take them to new scenes of activity.

"Why do you carry your camera, Russ?" asked Ruth, when she and her sister were seated near the young man, on whom devolved the duty of "filming," or taking, the various scenes of the plays it was planned to produce.

"Oh, I didn't know but what I might see something to 'shoot' it at," he answered, with a laugh. "You know Mr. Pertell sometimes sends films to the Moving Picture Weekly Newspaper—scenes of current events. I might catch one for him on the way."

"I see. Have you ever been to Oak Farm, Russ?"

"Yes, I went up there when Mr. Pertell looked it over to see if it would do for our new rural dramas."

"What sort of a place is it?" asked Alice.

"Very nice—for a farm."

"Isn't there something queer about it?" asked Ruth. "I mean wasn't there some sort of a mystery connected with Sandy Apgar, the young farmer who works it? You know we met him in New York," she added to Alice.

"Yes, I remember."

"Mystery?" spoke Russ, musingly. "Well, I believe there is something wrong about the place—not exactly a mystery, though. Maybe it's some sort of trouble. Well, here we go!"

The train had started out into the "wilds of Jersey," as Wellington Bunn, the tragic actor, put it. It was about forty miles to Beatonville, the trip occupying nearly two hours, for the train was not a fast one. The members of the company conversed on various topics in regard to some of the projected plays.

The train had stopped at a small station, and was gathering speed when there suddenly came such an application of the air brakes as to cause several persons in the aisle to fall. Others slid from their seats, or were thrown against the backs of the seats in front of them.

"What is it?"

"What's the matter?"

"An accident—let's get out!"

Before anyone could do anything, though, there was a terrific smash, and amid the wild tooting of a whistle could be heard the crashing and splintering of wood. Then the train came to a stop with a jerk that further scattered the frightened passengers.

"A smash-up!"

"A collision!"

"Oh, let's get out of here!"

No one could tell who was saying these things. They were shouted over and over again.

Russ Dalwood picked himself up from the floor of the car. A glance told him that no member of the company had been more than jarred or shaken, for their car was intact, and no windows were broken.

He helped Alice back to her seat, from which she had slid. Ruth had risen to her feet. Russ caught up his camera and made for the door.

"Oh, where are you going?" cried Alice, nervously clutching her leather purse. "Is any one hurt?"

"I don't know—I'm going to see," answered Russ. "And I'm going to film this smash. I may be able to get some good pictures for our newspaper service, Mr. Pertell," he added, as he hurried out.

CHAPTER II

A MISSING DOG

AFTER the first crash, the sudden stop, and the terrified cries, a silence followed that was almost as startling and nerve-racking as the accident had been.

Then benumbed senses gradually came back to their owners, and the passengers began to take stock of themselves and their surroundings.

"Is anybody hurt?" demanded Mr. Pertell, as he surveyed the interior of the car.

"We seem to be all right," replied Mr. DeVere, hoarsely, as he noted where his two daughters were standing together, their arms about each other.

"Py gracious, dot vos a smash, all right!" exclaimed Carl Switzer, the comedian of the company. "I pelief me dot I haf busted——"

"Not your leg—don't say you have broken your leg!" cried Mrs. Maguire, as she clasped her two grandchildren in her arms. Nellie, the

little girl, was crying, from having bumped her nose against the back of a seat.

"No, t'ank my lucky stars I haf not broken my leg. It iss only my shoe-lace!" exclaimed Mr. Switzer, triumphantly, as he held it up, dangling.

"Luck!" grunted Mr. Sneed in gloomy tones. "Is there any such thing as good luck? I knew something would happen when we started out on track thirteen. This company is doomed —I can see that."

"Well, then, please keep it to yourself," requested Mr. Pertell, sharply. "You are getting on the nerves of the ladies, Sneed!"

For Miss Pearl Pennington, and her friend Miss Laura Dixon—the two rather flashily-pretty girls mentioned before— were crying hysterically.

"It doesn't seem to be a very bad smash," went on Mr. Pertell. "Suppose we go out and see what caused it? I hope none of our baggage has been damaged."

"Oh, let's go out and see Russ taking moving pictures of the wreck!" proposed Alice, as she brushed off her blue suit.

"Are you sure you're all right?" asked Ruth, anxiously.

"Oh, certainly! Not hurt at all. Just jolted up a bit. Come on. You too, Daddy!"

Indeed the whole theatrical company, as well as the other passengers, made for the doors of the car. And while they are going out to see the extent of the damage I will take just a moment to make my new readers somewhat better acquainted with the characters of this story.

To begin with the moving picture girls themselves, they were Ruth and Alice DeVere, aged seventeen and fifteen respectively, the daughters of Hosmer DeVere, formerly a well known actor. As told in the first volume, "The Moving Picture Girls; Or, First Appearances in Photo Dramas," Mr. DeVere's voice had suddenly given out, when he was rehearsing for a part in a new play.

This came particularly hard, as he had been without an engagement for some time, and finances were low. The DeVere family lived in the Fenmore Apartment on one of the West Sixtieth streets of New York City. They were, in fact, about to be dispossessed for non-payment of rent when Mr. DeVere experienced a return of an old throat affection, making it impossible for him to speak his lines.

He was replaced in the character, and matters looked black indeed. Across the hall from the DeVere family lived Russ Dalwood, a moving picture operator, with his widowed mother and

brother, Billy. Russ learned of the distress of his neighbors, and suggested that as Mr. DeVere could act he might get a place with a moving picture company that produced picture dramas. In this work he would not need to speak very much.

At first Mr. DeVere would not hear of it, as he was an actor of some reputation in the "legitimate." But finally he yielded and became a member of the Comet Film Company. How his two daughters joined the company, through a mere accident, and how they made fame for themselves, you will find set down in the book; also how they aided Russ greatly when it seemed as if a valuable patent he had perfected, for an attachment to a moving picture camera, was in danger of being stolen.

Toward the close of that story you may learn how Mr. Pertell became acquainted with a young farmer named Sandy Apgar, who was working a large farm for his aged father, near Beatonville, in New Jersey. It happened that Mr. Pertell was contemplating the filming of a number of rural plays, and he made arrangements with Mr. Apgar to use the farm as a background for the scenes. The company would also live and board at the farmhouse, which was a large, old-fashioned home.

The players were on their way there when the accident occurred.

To go a little more into detail about the two girls, and the others, I might say that Ruth was tall, with deep blue eyes and light hair. She was rather inclined to be romantic, too, as might be suspected.

Alice was just the opposite—plump, jolly, always laughing or joking, and with a wealth of brown hair, and eyes like hazel nuts. She was very like her dead mother, while Ruth was more like her father in character.

Mr. Pertell was the manager and owner of the Comet Film Company, and I have already mentioned the principal players. Ruth and Alice were the newest members. Miss Pennington and Miss Dixon were from the vaudeville stage, and you could see this without being told. They were a bit jealous of the DeVere girls.

Mrs. Maguire, who was billed as "Cora Ashleigh," was generally played in "old woman parts." And she played them well. Her two grandchildren, Tommy and Nellie, occasionally had small parts in the plays. Mr. Switzer was the comedian, and, opposite to him, was Pepper Sneed, the "grouch." Wellington Bunn seemed always to have a grievance because he had not made a success in Shakespeare.

Pop Snooks was the "Old Reliable" property man of the company, and what he could not manufacture in the way of "props" at short notice was hardly worth mentioning.

The company of moving picture players and the other train passengers found a scene of desolation awaiting them as they alighted. But it was not as bad as might have been expected, and no one had been killed. In fact, no one was hurt, save the fireman and engineer of the passenger train, and they only slightly.

What had happened was this: A freight train, on a siding, had overrun a switch, and one of the cars encroached on the main line tracks. The passenger engine had "side-swiped" it, as the railroad term has it. That is, the engine had struck a glancing blow, and had been derailed. The baggage car, directly behind the engine, had been smashed, but a quick survey on the part of Mr. Pertell showed that the company's baggage had not been damaged.

The wreck was bad enough, however, and meant a delay until the track was cleared. The members of the company, and the other passengers, gathered about, looking on while the railroad men held a consultation as to what was best to be done.

"Look, there's Russ, taking pictures!" ex-

claimed Ruth, pointing to him. The young operator had gone to the baggage car and obtained the tripod of his camera. This he had set up in an advantageous position, and was industriously grinding away at the handle, taking pictures of the wreck on the moving strip of celluloid.

"This will be all right for our newspaper service!" he called to Mr. Pertell.

"That's right! Good work, Russ! But this will mean a delay in getting to Oak Farm."

However, there was no help for it. One of the trainmen went to the nearest station to telephone for the wrecking crew. Fortunately it was not necessary to bring one out from Hoboken, since at Dover, a station some miles down the line, such an equipment was kept. And a little later the wrecking crew was on the scene.

"I'll get some fine pictures now!" exulted Russ. "I'm glad I'm here, though I wouldn't want a railroad collision to happen every day. We might not get off so lucky next time."

"Luck! Don't mention luck!" grumbled Mr. Sneed. "The idea of starting out on track thirteen! I told you something would happen."

"Den you vas not disappointmented alretty yet!" laughed Mr. Switzer.

The work of getting the engine back on the

track was comparatively easy, and it was found that the train could proceed, since the running gear of the baggage car was intact.

The train was almost ready to go on again, when a woman, flashily dressed, and wearing many diamonds, came bustling up from the parlor car.

"Is my dog safe?" she inquired of the baggageman. "Is he hurt?"

"No'm, he's all right; or he was a little while ago," the man answered. "He was tied in the corner, just where you told me to put him. I guess he's there yet. His end of the car wasn't hit. But he howled a lot."

"Poor Rex! Let me see him." The lady went to the open door of the baggage car, and looked in. "Why, he's gone!" she cried. "My dog—my darling dog—is gone!"

"Can't be!" exclaimed the trainman. "He was tied right there a minute ago."

He jumped into the shattered car and looked about.

"Is he there?" cried the woman.

"No, ma'am, he's gone," was the answer. "But I don't see how it could be."

"Did he break loose?" the lady asked, with much eagerness.

"No, the strap is gone, and he couldn't pos-

sibly untie the knot I put in it. Someone has taken him, ma'am."

"Then this company is responsible, and I shall sue it!" the lady cried, bristling with what might be righteous anger. "My dog was a valuable one. Rex III has taken prize after prize, and I was on my way with him to a dog show now. Oh, Rex! Who could have taken you?" and she seemed genuinely distressed.

"What kind of a dog was he?" asked Alice, for she loved animals.

"A collie—a most beautiful collie. He had a pink bow on, and here it is! Oh, how I loved him! We were inseparable! And now he is gone!" and tears filled the lady's eyes.

CHAPTER III

ON TO THE FARM

DESPITE the excitement and hard work caused by the wreck, many of the trainmen had time to look for the missing dog. This was after the conductor had been appealed to by Mrs. Delamont, the owner of the prize animal.

And it appeared, from the deferential attitude of the conductor, that Mrs. Delamont was a person of some importance. Her husband was one of the directors of the railroad, and she was much interested in prize dogs.

But a careful search failed to disclose the missing Rex III. An examination of the car revealed nothing, and the baggage man was sure he had tied such a knot in the dog's leash that the animal could not have worked it loose.

"Besides," said Mrs. Delamont, "Rex would not leave me. Someone must have taken him."

"That's what I think," agreed the baggageman.

And this was very possible, as many strangers had been attracted to the scene of the wreck. Mrs. Delamont offered a reward of a hundred dollars for the return of her prize dog, and this spurred a number of volunteer searchers to work.

They scurried about the fields near the scene of the accident, but in spite of enticing calls and whistles no Rex answered.

"I'm afraid he is gone," said Alice, who had taken quite a liking to Mrs. Delamont, in spite of the lady's rather "loud" dress and manners.

"Oh, I must find him!" exclaimed Mrs. Delamont. "I shall have to advertise," she went on. "This is not the first time he has been taken. He is such a fine-looking dog that many are attracted to him. And he is so friendly! Oh, Rex, where are you?"

But Rex III was not to be found, and the trainmen could no longer delay. A last search was made in the surrounding fields, and then the passengers went back to their cars. A substitute engineer and fireman had come with the wrecking crew.

Mrs. Delamont made many inquiries as to whether anyone had seen her dog being led away, but no one had, and lamenting over her loss, and dwelling on the fine qualities and value of her pet, she resumed her seat in the parlor car.

"Well, I sure did get some fine pictures," remarked Russ, as he came back to the others of the film company. "It will be something for our newspaper service, all right."

"We'll send them back to New York from the next station," said Mr. Pertell, "and wire that they're on the way. They can develop and print them there."

In the first book of this series I have described the mechanical part of moving pictures, how they are made and prepared for projection on the screen. To briefly sum it up, I might say that the pictures, or negatives, are taken on a continuous strip of celluloid film in a specially prepared camera, which takes views at the rate of sixteen per second. Then, after this long strip of negative is developed, a positive, as it is called, is made, and this is run through the projecting machine in the theatre. Thus, by means of powerful lenses, and intense lights, the miniature pictures, less than an inch in width, are enlarged to life size.

In order to make sure that the passengers should reach their destinations the train that had been in the wreck was stopped at the next important station. There a new baggage car was put on, and another engine. Russ took advantage of the delay to send back, by express, the film he had made of the collision, at the same time tele-

graphing the manager of the film studio to expect the reel.

The journey to Beatonville was then taken up again, and proceeded without further accident. The train was somewhat delayed, and when it drew up at the small station Ruth, Alice and the others looked out eagerly to see what sort of place it was.

"It isn't as bad as you said, Russ!" exclaimed Ruth. "I see two houses, anyhow."

"Not many more, though," he answered, with a laugh.

Beatonville was a typical country railroad town, and quite a crowd of depot loungers gathered around as the theatrical company alighted.

As the train went on its way again Alice caught a glimpse of Mrs. Delamont at one of the windows in the parlor car. The owner of the missing Rex III waved her hand in friendly farewell to the girl.

"I wish I could find her dog," thought Alice. "It's too bad to have a pet and lose him."

"I don't like dogs!" exclaimed Ruth. "I'm always afraid they'll bite me."

Alice laughed at her sister's nervousness.

"There's Sandy!" exclaimed Russ, pointing to a young farmer who was holding the heads of two horses attached to a large "carryall."

"Come on!" called Mr. Pertell to his players.

"I expect you're all hungry, on account of the delay. Have you anything to eat out at your place?" he called to Sandy.

"Yep. Ma's been bakin' an' cookin' for th' last week!" was the comforting answer. "We're all ready for you. I'm going to take you over in this rig, and I've got another wagon for your trunks and stuff. Have a good journey?"

"Good! Bah! A' smash-up!" growled Mr. Sneed. "But we might have expected it—starting out on track thirteen."

"Yah! But ve are all right now, alretty yet!" laughed Mr. Switzer.

Ruth, Alice and the others looked about them with interest. It was a typical country landscape —a little valley nestling amid the green hills.

"Oh, I know I'm going to like it here," murmured Ruth. "It is so restful!"

"Restful! Yes! I should say it was!" exclaimed Pearl Pennington, as she bent a stick of chewing gum, preparatory to enjoying it. "I know what I'll do, all right!"

"What, dear?" asked her friend Laura Dixon, with lazy interest. "What'll you do?"

"I'll be going back to little old New York in about a week. This place has got on my nerves already. Ugh! Isn't it quiet!"

It certainly was, after the departure of the train. There was none of the various noises of

New York. Even the horses seemed ready to go to sleep as they stood lazily at the shafts or poles of the vehicles they drew.

"Come on!" cried Sandy, hospitably. "It's quite a little drive out to our farm, and I know your folks must be tired and hungry."

"Hungry! That's no name for it!" voiced Miss Dixon. "Have you any lobsters, Mr. Apgar?"

"Lobsters? No'm. They don't raise none of them birds out here. But we got chicken."

"Oh, listen to him, Pearl!" exclaimed Miss Dixon. "He thinks a lobster is a bird."

"Don't mind them," said Paul Ardite to Sandy, in a low voice. "It hasn't been many years that they could afford lobster. Chicken for mine, every time."

"Well, they do say ma cooks th' best chicken around here," spoke Sandy, proudly. "She done it in Southern style this time."

"Say no more!" exclaimed Mr. DeVere. "Sandy, you are a gentleman and a scholar. How long will it take us to get to your farm?"

"About half an hour."

"That's twenty-nine minutes too long, since you have mentioned chicken in Southern style. But do your best."

Seated in the comfortable carryall, the mem-

bers of the moving picture company began their trip to Oak Farm. The way lay along a pleasant country road, and in the distance could be seen the cool, green hills.

It was early June, and, all about, the farmers were doing their work. The air was sweet with the scent of flowers and the green woods, for the road led past several forest patches where the wind swept pleasantly through the swaying trees.

"Oh, it is just lovely here!" sighed Ruth, as she removed her hat and let the gentle wind blow about her hair. "I know I shall love it. And, Daddy dear, maybe it will do your voice good."

"Perhaps it will, daughter," he agreed. "However, since we are doing so well in moving pictures, I have not the desire I had at first to get back to the boards. I am becoming content in this line."

"I'm glad," said Alice, "for I like it very much. Oh, it is lovely here, Ruth!"

"Just fine, I call it!" exclaimed Russ. "The air is so clear. I'm sure we'll get fine pictures here."

"I know we'll die of loneliness," grumbled Miss Pennington. "I wish we hadn't come, Laura."

"So do I, but there's no help for it now," replied Miss Dixon.

Rumbling behind the carryall was the farm

wagon containing the trunks, and in less than the half-hour stipulated by Sandy, Oak Farm was reached. Ruth, Alice and their father fell in love with the place at first sight. Mr. Pertell and Russ had seen it before, and most of the others admired it.

There was a big, old-fashioned farmhouse, setting back from the road, and fronted by a wide stretch of green lawn. The house was white, with green shutters, and was well kept. Back of it were barns and other farm buildings, some of which were rather dilapidated.

"Welcome to Oak Farm!" cried Sandy. "There's Pa Felix and Ma Nance lookin' for ye! Here they are, Ma!" he called. "All ready for your chicken."

"Bring 'em right in!" the mother invited, cordially.

Ruth and Alice liked the farmer's wife at once. There was a stoop to her shoulders that told of many weary days of work, and she looked worn and tired, but there was a bright welcome in her eyes as she greeted the visitors. "Pa Felix," as Sandy called his father, was rather old and feeble.

"Come right in and make yourselves to home," urged Mrs. Apgar. "Your rooms is all ready for ye!"

"Where is the bell-boy?" asked Miss Pen-

nington, with uptilted head and powdered nose. "I want him to take my valise to my room at once. And I shall want a bath before dinner."

"Isn't she horrid, to try to put on such airs here?" said Alice to Ruth, nodding in the direction of the vaudeville actress.

"Yes. She only does it to make trouble."

Sandy and his father were talking together in low tones in one corner of the big parlor.

"You didn't get any word; did you?" asked the old man.

"No, Pa. There wasn't no letter."

"Then we won't git th' money."

"It don't look so."

"And we'll have to lose th' place?"

"I—I'm afraid so," replied Sandy.

"Gosh! That—that's hard, in my old age," said the elderly farmer, softly. "I hoped your ma and I'd be able to end our days here. But I guess it ain't to be. However, this company will help us pay some of the claims. We'll do the best we can, Sandy."

"That's what we will!"

Alice wondered what secret trouble could be worrying the farmer and his son. Mrs. Apgar, too, had an anxious look on her face, but she tried to make her visitors feel at home.

CHAPTER IV

A QUEER PROPOSAL

OAK FARM was a most delightful place. Ruth and Alice agreed to this even before the first meal was served. They stood at the window of their room—a large one with two beds—and gazed across the green meadows, off to the greener woodland and then to the distant hills which girt the valley holding Oak Farm in its clasp.

The hills were purple now with the coming of night— a deep purple like the depth of a woodland violet—and their tops were shrouded in mist.

At the foot of the hills ran a little river, and now it looked like some ribbon of silver, twining in and out amid the green carpet of the fields.

"Oh, isn't it beautiful—just beautiful!" sighed Ruth.

"Do you mean the odor of that fried chicken?" asked Alice, with a frank laugh, as she let down her hair, preparatory to putting it

up again, in the general process of "dressing." "It is delightful; but I would hardly call it 'beautiful.'"

"Oh, you know what I mean!" returned Ruth, not turning from the window which gave a view of the distant hills. "I'm speaking of the scenery."

"Oh, yes, I suppose it is beautiful," agreed Alice, who, truth to tell, was not gifted with a very strong æsthetic sense. "But I suppose Mr. Pertell came here because it was so practical for the rural dramas."

"Beauty counts in them, too," said Ruth, softly. "Oh, just look at the purple light on those hills, Alice!"

"Can't, my dear. I've dropped a hairpin and I can't see it in the dark. Gracious, I never thought! We won't have any electric lights here, and no gas. I wonder if we'll have to go back to candle days."

"They weren't so bad," observed Ruth. "I think it must have been fine in the Colonial days, to have the candles all aglow, and——"

"Candle fiddlesticks!" exclaimed Alice, who could be very outspoken at times. "Give me an incandescent light, every time. It's getting dark here. I wonder what system of illumination they have?"

"Kerosene lamps," replied Ruth. "There's one on the mantel. I'll light it."

"Do, that's a dear. I've dropped another hairpin, and I need every one."

There was silence in the bedroom of the old-fashioned country house for a space. Ruth lighted the lamp, and drew down the window shades.

The girls freshened themselves up after their journey, and prepared to descend to the dining room. From the kitchen came more delicious odors as Mrs. Apgar and her helper finished preparing the evening meal.

Scattered about, in other apartments of the big farmhouse, were the other members of the film theatrical company. Mr. DeVere had been given a room near his daughters', and they could hear him talking in his husky voice to Mr. Pertell, who was across the hall.

"When are they going to begin taking the pictures?" asked Ruth, as she helped Alice hook up a waist that fastened in the back.

"Oh, not for some days yet, I fancy," was the answer. "Mr. Pertell will have to look around, and pick out the best backgrounds for the different scenes. I wonder what sort of parts I'll get? Something funny, I hope; like tumbling into the river and being rescued."

"Alice! You wouldn't want anything like that!" cried Ruth, much shocked.

"Wouldn't I, though! Just give me a chance. I can swim, you know!"

"Yes, I know, but tumbling into the river—with your clothes on—it might be dangerous!"

"Oh, well, if we're in the moving picture business we will have to learn to take chances. I read in the paper the other day how a couple leaped from the Brooklyn Bridge with a parachute—a man and woman."

"Yes, I know; but we're not going to do anything like *that!* Papa wouldn't let us."

"No, I suppose not," and Alice sighed as though she really wanted to indulge in some such daring "stunt" as a bridge leap.

"I know one part you're going to have, Ruth," went on Alice, as she surveyed herself in the glass.

"What is it?" asked Ruth, eagerly. "Shall I like it?"

"I think you will, dear. It's laid in an old mill—there is one on Oak Farm, I believe. You're to be imprisoned in it, and your lover rides up—probably on one of those silly milk-white steeds I object to—and rescues you—breaks down the door in fact—and gets you just as you are about to be bound on the mill wheel."

"Really, Alice?" cried Ruth, clasping her hands in delight, for she dearly loved a romantic role.

"Really and truly—truly rural, I call it."

"How did you hear of it?"

"Oh, I overheard daddy and Mr. Pertell talking about it. Mr. Pertell asked daddy if he'd object to your taking a part like that."

"And what did dad say?"

"Oh, he agreed to it, as long as you weren't in danger. But I want something funny. I believe I'm to be a sort of 'cut-up' country maid, in some of the plays. I'm to upset the milk pails, tie a tin can to the calf's tail, hide under the sofa, when your country 'beaus' come to see you, and all that."

"Oh, Alice!"

"That's all right—I just love parts like that. None of the love business for me!"

"I should say not—you're entirely too young!" exclaimed Ruth, with sudden dignity.

"Pooh! You're not so old! Oh, there goes the supper bell. Come on! I'm starved!"

The entire theatrical troupe gathered about the table, and a merry party it was. That Mrs. Apgar was a good cook was one of the first matters voted on, and there was not a dissenting voice. It was well that there was plenty of

chicken, for nearly everyone had more than the first helping.

"Ach! But I'm glad that I came here!" announced Mr. Switzer, as he passed his plate for more. "Ven I get so old dot I can vork no more, I am coming here!" and he leaned back with a contented sigh.

Even Pepper Sneed smiled graciously, and for once seemed to have no fault to find, and no dire prediction to make.

"The meal is very good," he said to Pop Snooks, the property man.

"Glad you think so—even if we did come out on track thirteen," was the reply. "I think that accident was the best thing that could happen. It delayed us so we all had fine appetites."

After supper the members of the company went on the broad veranda, to sit in the dusk of the evening and listen to the call of the night insects.

"We'll all have a day or so of rest," Mr. Pertell said. "That is, you folks will, while I lay out my plans and decide what we are to make first. Russ, I'll want you, the first thing in the morning, to take a walk around the farm with me, and we'll decide on which are the best backgrounds."

"Oh, may I come!" cried Alice, before Ruth could restrain her.

"Why, yes, I guess so," answered the manager, slowly. "Only we'll probably do a deal of walking."

"I don't tire easily," Alice replied.

"Oh, by the way, Mr. 'Apgar," said Mr. Pertell after a pause, turning to the farmer, "I am planning one play that has a barn-burning incident in it. Have you some old barn on the premises I could set fire to."

"Good land!" exclaimed the farmer, starting from his chair. "Set fire to a barn! Why th' idea! Th' sheriff will git after you, sure pop. That's arson, man!"

"Oh, no, not the way I'd do it," laughed the manager. "I'd be willing to pay you for the barn, so no one would lose anything. Haven't you some such building on the place—one that isn't of much use?"

"Wa'al, I reckon there might be," was the slow answer, as if the farmer could not understand the strange proposition. "But as fer settin' fire to it; wa'al, I reckon you'll have to git permission of th' mortgagee. You see we're in trouble about this place. Sandy, maybe you'd better tell him," and he turned to his son.

CHAPTER V

SANDY'S STORY

FOR a moment or two Mr. Pertell seemed rather embarrassed. He feared he had forced some unpleasant secret from the farmer, and he did not want to hurt his feelings. Then, too, he remembered that Sandy had hinted at some trouble at the farm. This was probably it, and it had to do with money.

"Perhaps you would rather not talk about it," suggested the manager, after a pause. He and Sandy were at one end of the porch now, the others having gone in. Felix Apgar, preferring to let his son do the talking, had risen from his chair, and was going slowly down the gravel walk to close the gate lest some stray cow wander in from the highway and eat his wife's favorite flowers.

"Oh, I reckon I might jest as well tell you," spoke Sandy, slowly. "It's bound to come out

sooner or later, and then everybody in Beatonville will hear of our trouble."

"Then it is trouble?" asked Mr. Pertell.

"That's what it is."

"If I could do anything to help," suggested the manager, "I would be glad to."

"No, I don't reckon you could, unless you wanted to invest quite a sum of money in this farm," returned the young man.

"Well, I'm afraid I'm hardly ready to do that," declared Mr. Pertell. "Farming isn't in my line, and I've got about all my spare funds invested in the moving picture business. But if a loan would help you——"

"That's th' trouble!" interrupted Sandy. "We've got too much of a loan now, and we can't pay it off. Th' place is 'mortgaged up to th' handle,' as they say out this way. That's why pa couldn't give you permission to burn a barn.

"We have an old shack, that's almost toppling over, and it would be better burned and out of th' way. But I guess Squire Blasdell would object if you sot fire to it. The squire pretty near owns our place with this mortgage; or, rather with th' mortgages of folks he represents. He's a lawyer," he added simply. "But maybe if you paid him what he thought the barn was wuth he'd let you fire it."

"Then I'll have to talk to him," went on Mr. Pertell. "I need a barn-burning in one scene. It will be very effective, I think."

"Gosh! But you movin' picture fellers certainly do things," commented Sandy. "You hire yachts to make believe take a trip to Europe, and now you're wantin' to burn a barn! I never heard tell th' like of such doin's."

"Oh, that's nothing to what some of them do," remarked the manager. "Why, some of my competitors have bought old steamboats, taken them out in mid-ocean, and set fire to them, just to get a rescue picture."

"Get out!" cried Sandy, clearly incredulous.

"That's a fact," declared Mr. Pertell. "And, more than once, some of them have bought old locomotives and coaches, and set them going toward each other on the same track, to make a railroad collision."

"Do you mean it?" cried Sandy.

"I certainly do. Why, one manager actually burned up a whole mining town just to get a good picture. He destroyed more than twenty shacks. Of course they weren't very elaborate ones, but he got a fine effect."

"Wa'al, then I reckon burnin' one barn isn't so wonderful," observed Sandy.

"No, indeed. And I'll see Squire Blasdell the

first thing in the morning to get my plans ready for this. But I'm sorry to hear of your trouble, Sandy, I sure am. What caused it; did the crops fail?"

"No, we've always had pretty good crops, or we wouldn't stay here," answered the young farmer. "But I don't reckon we'll be able to stay here much longer. It will be hard for pa and ma, too. They dont' want to leave—it will break 'em all up. They've lived here all their lives, and they counted on dyin' and bein' buried here. But I reckon they won't now."

"Why not? Are you about to be put off the farm?"

"We will be, by fall, unless I can raise four thousand dollars—and I can't do that, nohow," said Sandy, sadly.

"That's too bad," spoke the manager, sympathetically. "How did it all come about? That is, if you don't mind telling me."

"Oh, no. I don't mind," answered the young farmer, in rather hopeless tones. "You see father had a brother—Uncle Isaac he was, and he was quite a business man, in a way. He used to farm it, but he gave that up, and went into other schemes. I never knew rightly what they were, but he used to make money—at least he must have got it somehow, for he didn't work.

"Well, one time, several years ago, he came to pa and borrowed quite a sum—more than five thousand dollars I've heard pa say it was. He and ma had inherited most of it only a short time before from pa's granduncle Nathan and they decided to keep it ready to pay off th' mortgage, but 'fore pa could do that Uncle Isaac come and borrowed it."

"But why did your uncle need to borrow money when he had so much of his own?" asked Mr. Pertell, curiously.

"Wa'al, there was some business deal on. I never understood th' right of it, and I don't believe pa did, either. All I know is that Uncle Isaac got pa's money. I believe he wanted to go into some scheme—Uncle Isaac did—and didn't have quite enough cash. He promised to pay pa back in a few weeks, and give him big interest for the use of the money.

"Pa set quite a store by Uncle Isaac, and so he let him have th' money that ought to have gone to pay off th' mortgage. And then things went wrong. Uncle Isaac died before he could pay pa back th' money, and from then on things went from bad to worse, until now we're goin' to lose th' farm."

"But my dear man!" exclaimed Mr. Pertell, "if your uncle owed your father money, and your

father had a note, or any paper to prove his claim, he could collect from your uncle's estate."

"That's th' trouble," said Sandy. "There wasn't no estate."

"But he must have left something! What became of the money he got from your father?"

"Nobody knew. You see poor Uncle Isaac went crazy before he died, and was put in th' asylum. In fact, that's where he died. He was clean out of his mind."

"But did you try to find what he had done with the money? I should have thought you could do that."

"We did try, and even got a lawyer to try," replied Sandy. "But it was no use. Uncle Isaac would only laugh at us. Poor fellow, he meant all right, but his head give way. He wouldn't have cheated pa for the world. It was jest an accident—that's all."

"You see he was near our threshing machine one day when there was an accident. Somethin' broke and Uncle Isaac was hit on th' head. Not hard enough to kill him, but it made him forget things, and he died that way."

"But couldn't you tell from the papers he left where he had invested the money—his own, as well as your father's?"

"That's th' odd part of it. We couldn't find

a scrap of paper, nor a dollar, among his things. You see Uncle Isaac was queer, even before he went crazy. He didn't believe in banks, and he used to hide his papers and money in all sorts of out-of-the-way places. He lived all alone—an old bachelor."

"Did you search for his things?" asked Mr. Pertell, who was much impressed by Sandy's story.

"Oh, yes! We searched all over!" exclaimed Sandy. "But we couldn't find a thing. It's too bad, for Uncle Isaac never would have done it for th' world, if he had been in his right mind."

"No, I suppose not," agreed Mr. Pertell. "Have you any papers to show that your father let him have the money?"

"Oh, yes, we've got a note. But it's no good. Uncle Isaac is dead, and he didn't leave nothin'. We've searched all over, and couldn't find a thing. No, I reckon th' only thing to do is to lose the farm. But it will come hard on pa and ma—it surely will."

Mr. Pertell said nothing. There was little he could say to make the sad lot of the Apgar family any easier. The manager wished he could provide the money himself, but, as he had said, he had invested all his surplus cash in the moving picture business. The taking of the rural dramas

was going to cost considerable, too, and there would be the added expense of burning the barn.

Mr. Pertell was paying a fair price for the use of the farm, and for the board and lodging of his company. This would, in a measure, help the Apgars, but it would not be anywhere near enough to save the place.

"Well, it certainly is too bad," agreed the manager. "When I see Squire Blasdell to ask permission to burn the barn, I'll see if he won't wait a bit about foreclosing. Then perhaps we can think up some other plan—or we may even help you find the money," he added, hopefully.

"There ain't much chance of that," returned Sandy. "We've hunted high and low for that money, or for any papers to tell where it might be. As for Squire Blasdell, he's harder than flint. He wouldn't wait a day after th' money was due. No, we've got to lose the farm."

Truly there seemed no way out, but Mr. Pertell was not one to give up easily. He made up his mind that when he got the chance he would see some of his friends in New York. He might be able to induce one of them to provide the money, and take up the mortgage, holding it until it could be paid off gradually. But he said nothing of this now, for he did not want to raise false hopes.

"Well, I reckon I'll turn in," announced Sandy, after a bit. "I'm not used to staying up late. Is everything all right?"

"Oh, yes, indeed—very nice," replied the manager. "I'm going to start in planning to-morrow."

Sandy arose to go in, and, as he did so he peered out toward the road. The moon had risen and it was quite light. Mr. Pertell saw a dark figure slouching along the highway.

"That you, 'Bige?" called Sandy, evidently thinking he saw some neighbor. But the man in the road did not answer. Instead he broke into a run, as though frightened.

"That's queer!" exclaimed Sandy. "I'm going to see who that is."

"I'm with you!" declared the manager, and they hurried down the gravel path.

CHAPTER VI

THE BUTTING BULL

SPEEDING to the front gate the theatrical man and the young farmer darted down the moonlit road. It was a straight highway, and the white dust added to the effect of the moon, that was now well over the trees.

But, to the surprise of the two men, no figure was in sight. As they reached the highway it was deserted, though it had been but a few seconds since Sandy had seen and called to the man in the road.

"He—he's gone!" gasped Sandy.

"So he is. Must have slipped to one side," agreed the manager. "Do you want to get him? Who was he?"

"That's jest what I don't know. First I thought he was 'Bige Tapper, who lives down th' road a piece. But 'Bige would have answered."

"But this fellow didn't, so he couldn't have been your friend," spoke Mr. Pertell. "And

why should he have run when you hailed him?"

"That's what I can't understand," replied Sandy. "It's sort of suspicious; ain't it?'

"It surely is. Come on, let's have a look."

Together they went down the road in the direction taken by the mysterious stranger. But, though they looked on both sides, and peered amid the bushes, they saw no one. They called out, demanding to know who had gone past the house; but of course, in case the man was a suspicious character, they could hardly have expected an answer.

Their shouts, though, brought out Paul, who had not yet gone to bed, and he joined in the search.

"Who do you think he was?" the moving picture actor asked of Sandy, when they had given up the attempt to find the man.

"Oh, he might be some tramp. There's been chicken thieves around lately, and maybe he was lookin' for a chance to sneak into our hen-house."

"Well, I guess you've scared him off, at any rate," said the manager.

"There's an idea for a film," said Paul, with a laugh. "We can have a chicken-stealing. The thief gets caught in a bear trap, and can't get loose—farmer comes out with gun—chase over the fields and all that."

"Good!" cried Mr. Pertell. "We'll try something of that sort. I'm glad you mentioned it."

"Gosh!" exclaimed Sandy, admiringly. "You fellers would make a picture out of anything, I guess."

"That's what we would!" laughed Mr. Pertell.

They came back from the unsuccessful man hunt, and soon quiet settled down over Oak Farm.

"I only wish I could help them," mused Mr. Pertell as he retired. Yet he was destined to help them, and in a most surprising manner.

Yielding to the wish of Sandy, Paul and the manager said nothing the next morning of the chase after the man.

"It might only worry pa and ma," said the kind-hearted but simple-minded young farmer. "And they've got troubles enough as it is."

"They certainly have," agreed Mr. Pertell. "Nothing was disturbed last night, though; was there?"

"No, all th' hens seem to be around. I can't imagine who that fellow was. He must have had a guilty conscience, or he wouldn't have run when I hailed him," Sandy said.

The day was given over, on the part of the manager and Russ, to selecting the most favorable spots for the taking of scenes in the rural

dramas. A good background, and places where the lighting effects would be proper for exposing the films, were essentials. Some scenes were to be laid in the village proper, and when the moving picture manager and his photographer went about, making notes of likely spots, they were watched curiously by the village loungers.

Mr. Pertell paid a visit to Squire Blasdell in reference to getting permission to burn the old barn on the Apgar place.

"Well, you can do it if you pay me my price," said the crabbed man, who was a local judge and lawyer, acting for several clients.

The price was sufficiently high, Mr. Pertell thought, but he had no choice.

"That's a valuable barn!" said the squire.

"It's only fit for kindling wood," protested the manager. "And that's what I propose to use it for."

"Well, it's a sin to burn down a building like that," went on the squire. "But this is a queer world, anyhow. And I want my money in advance."

He was so unpleasant about the matter that, after arranging for the destruction of the barn, Mr. Pertell left without carrying out his half-formed resolution of asking for more time for the payment of the Apgar mortgage.

"I'd better try to find some other way of helping them," thought the manager. "If I said they were in hard circumstances the squire might get suspicious and foreclose at once. Then I would have to take my company away, and I couldn't get the rural dramas. No, I'll wait a while. But I would like to help Sandy and his folks."

During the two days that Mr. Pertell and Russ were mapping out the locations of the various scenes for the plays, the others of the company were becoming familiar with Oak Farm, and the delightfully quaint house where they were to remain all summer.

There were many little nooks where one could spend a quiet hour with a book, and there was good fishing in the stream that, in times past, had furnished power for the old grist mill. The mill was now in ruins, but it was very picturesque, and Mr. Pertell planned to make it the scene of several little plays.

Three days after the arrival at Oak Farm, matters were in readiness for filming the first play. It was a simple little drama, concerning a country girl and boy, and Alice and Paul Ardite were the chief characters.

This was something of a blow to Miss Laura Dixon, who had counted on being with Paul in the play. Miss Dixon rather liked Paul, but since

the advent of Alice he had become more and more interested in the latter.

"I don't care!" exclaimed Miss Dixon, as she flounced into the room she shared with Miss Pennington. "I'm not going to stay with this company any more, with those two amateurs taking all the best parts."

"It is a shame," agreed Miss Pennington. "I just can't bear that Ruth DeVere, with her blue eyes. She can use them very effectively, too."

"Indeed she can! What do you say if we look for another engagement? I just hate the country."

"So do I, with all the bugs and things. But, really, I can't go. I got Mr. Pertell to give me an advance on my salary, and I can't leave him now. Besides, other places aren't so easy to get. Look here," and she held out a copy of a dramatic paper which contained an unusual number of "cards" of performers who were "at liberty." That is, they had no work, but were anxious for some.

"Summer is a bad time for quitting a sure place," went on Miss Pennington. "We'll just have to stick, Laura."

"I suppose so. But I can't bear those two girls!"

"Neither can I!"

But Alice and Ruth concerned themselves very little with their jealous rivals, though they were aware of the feeling against them. Alice and Paul acquitted themselves well in the little play.

There was only one difficulty—Mr. Bunn, as usual.

He and Mr. Sneed had been cast as farm hands to fill in the background of the play. When the former Shakespearean player learned that he was to wear overalls and carry a hoe over his shoulder, he rebelled.

"What! I play that character?" he cried. "A clod—a country bumpkin? Never! I will go back to New York first!"

"Very well; go!" exclaimed Mr. Pertell, who occasionally became exasperated over the actor's objections. "Only don't come back looking for an engagement with this company."

Wellington Bunn, striking a tragic attitude, was silent a moment. Then he said, very quietly:

"Where is that hoe?"

With Mr. Sneed it was different. He did not so much care what character he played, but he was always "looking for trouble." Even in the simple character of a country farmer he was apprehensive.

"I don't know how to use a hoe," he protested.

"I'm sure to do the wrong thing with it. I know something will happen!"

"How can something happen?" asked Mr. Pertell. "All you have to do is to stand in a row of corn, and dig up the dirt with the hoe. You're only in the scene about two minutes. Surely you can hill corn!"

"I never did it."

"I'll show you," offered Sandy, good-naturedly.

"Say!" cried Russ, "why not put Sandy in the picture, too?"

"Good idea!" exclaimed Mr. Pertell. "Sandy, get a hoe!"

"What! Me in movin' pictures? Why, I never acted in my life."

"So much the better. You'll be all the more natural!" said the manager. "Get in the focus, Sandy!"

And the young farmer did. The scene seemed to be going very well, and Paul and Alice in the role of country sweethearts made an effective picture in the green cornfield.

In the background Mr. Bunn, Mr. Sneed and Sandy were industriously hoeing corn. Suddenly the "grouchy" actor dropped his hoe, and pulling up one foot so that he could hold it in his hands, he cried out:

"There! I knew something would happen! I cut my foot with that old hoe!"

"Cut that out, Russ!" called the manager, sharply. "We don't want that in the scene."

"I stopped the camera," answered the operator.

An examination disclosed the fact that Mr. Sneed was not hurt at all. His shoe had not even been cut by the hoe, which had slipped off a stone because of his clumsiness.

"Go on with the play," ordered Mr. Pertell. "And let's have no more nonsense."

Paul and Alice resumed their places. They assumed as nearly as possible the pose they had when the break occurred. Russ began to turn the handle of the camera. Sandy had to be excused for a time to look after some farm work.

Later, when the pictures would be developed and printed, enough of the film could be cut out so that the audience, looking at the screen, would know nothing of what had occurred.

There are many trick pictures made, and many times little accidents occur in filming a play. But by the judicious use of the knife, and the fitting together of the severed film, all pictures not wanted are eliminated.

In the case of trick pictures, or when some accident scene is shown, the camera takes views

up to a certain point with real persons posing before it. Then the mechanism is stopped, "dummies" are substituted for real personages, and the taking of the film goes on. So the little "break" caused by Mr. Sneed could be covered up.

"But I knew something would happen," he said. "That hoodoo of coming out on track thirteen is still after us," and he limped along the row of corn.

The scene was almost over, when a movement was observed amid the waving stalks, back of where Paul and Alice were posing.

"Who's that!" cried Mr. Pertell, sharply, from his place beside Russ at the camera. "Keep back, whoever you are. Don't get into the picture —you'll spoil it."

An instant later there was a bellow, as of a score of automobile horns, and an immense black bull came rushing through the corn, heading directly for Paul and Alice.

"Oh!" screamed Alice, as Paul caught her in his arms.

CHAPTER VII

THE PLAY OF THE HOSE

"Russ! Daddy! Somebody save Alice!" cried Ruth, from her place near the young moving picture operator. "Can't someone do something?"

"Get a pitchfork!"

"Go at him with those hoes!"

"Throw stones at him!"

This was some of the advice from the others of the moving picture company, as they stood grouped back of the camera, where they had been watching the filming of the last scene in the little drama.

Meanwhile, of course, Russ had stopped the camera, for he did not want to include the bull in the picture, no provision having been made for the creature by the author who furnished the "scenario," or "screed."

The animal had "butted into" the scene in a most uncalled-for manner, and now was butting its massive head against the frail green stalks of

corn, knocking them aside, pawing the dirt and shaking its head at the frightened players.

For a moment, after their first outcries, the players were silent. Alice, who had shown just the least inclination to faint, now stood upright again, and with a vivid blush, released herself from Paul's arms.

"I—I'm all right now," she said, softly, straightening out her shirtwaist.

"You won't be if that bull comes for us," he answered. "Here, get behind me. I'll see if I can scare him off."

"Oh, no! Don't!" she begged. "That might make him worse. See, he is quiet now."

And indeed the animal had not moved much beyond the spot where he had broken through the rows of corn to interrupt the moving pictures.

"Something's got to be done," said Mr. Pertell, in a quiet voice. "I think it will be best if none of you moves. Keep your places, and I'll see if I can't slide out back of Russ, and get help—or at least a weapon to drive the bull away. A fence rail would do. Russ, stand still. You make a good screen for me now, and the bull can't see me. He may make a jump if he sees any of us moving. Such creatures often do, I understand."

It seemed the best plan to follow, but there was no need of trying it, for at that instant Sandy

Apgar, who had returned, and who had heard the cries, came bursting in on the scene.

For a moment, at seeing this new figure, and supposing, perhaps, that it was a more active enemy than the others, the bull made as if to leap forward, with lowered horns. But, fortunately, the young farmer had an effective weapon in a pitchfork. Its sharp tines Sandy held toward the bull, pricking the creature slightly. This was too much for the beast, and with a bellow of pain, instead of rage, as before, he turned, and with drooping tail crashed his way through the corn, as he had come.

"Pesky gritter!" exclaimed Mr. Switzer, in his strong German accent. "He nearly gafe me heart disease. Feel how he thumps inside my west," he appealed to Mr. Sneed.

"Ha! What do I care about your heart!" exclaimed the "grouch," inconsiderately. "My foot will be lame for a week where I hit it. This is getting worse and worse—I suppose you'll be turning wild tigers and lions loose on us next!" he cried in a highly aggrieved tone to Mr. Pertell.

"This wasn't my fault," said the manager. "I did not invite the bull here."

"No, I guess nobody did," laughed Sandy. "But I hope he didn't hurt any of you."

"No, he only scared us," said Ruth, who had gone to the side of her sister.

"I can't understand how he got out," went on the young farmer. "He's kept in a field with a strong fence, and th' gate is always locked. Th' hired man knows better than to let him out, too."

"It might be a good idea to see that he is put back in his enclosure," suggested Mr. DeVere. "I'm sure we'll all feel safer if we know he isn't roaming about the place when we pose for more pictures."

"Indeed we will," agreed Mr. Pertell. "I can see you all looking around nervously, instead of paying attention to the play, if that bull isn't locked up."

"I'll attend to it right away," promised Sandy. "He's dangerous enough, but he's afraid of this pitchfork. I can always manage him with that. I'll go see how he got out. I don't understand it."

"I'll go with you," volunteered Russ. "We'll have to make the last bit of this scene over," he went on, to Mr. Pertell.

"Yes, I suppose so," agreed the manager.

"And they'll want a little time to get over the scare so they can pose properly," went on Russ, nodding at Alice and Paul, who, as well as the others who filled in the background of the picture, were somewhat disturbed.

"Yes, it will be just as well to take a breathing space," said Mr. Pertell. "But don't run into danger, Russ. We've got lots of plays yet to film."

"I won't," laughed the young operator, and as he went off after Sandy, Ruth gazed after him with rather anxious eyes.

"I knew something like this would happen!" exclaimed Mr. Sneed, gloomily. "That track thirteen——"

"Say, if you don't drop that you can look for another place!" cried the manager, sharply. "Everything that happens you blame on that silly superstition."

"And things aren't done happening yet, either," went on the "grouchy" actor, but he took care not to let the manager hear him.

"To what low estate have I fallen!" soliloquized Wellington Bunn, wiping his heated brow. He was wearing a slouch hat, instead of his beloved silk one, and was attired in shabby garments, as befitted his character of a farmhand. "The idea of a man who has played the immortal Shakespearean characters falling so low as to consort with wild bulls. Ah, it is pitiful—pitiful!" he murmured.

"You didn't consort mit dat bull very much!" put in Mr. Switzer, with a cheerful laugh. "I

saw you trying to git behint a corn stalk, to consort mit 'im alretty yet!"

"Certainly, I did not wish to be trampled on," replied Mr. Bunn, with dignity—that is, with as much dignity as he could muster under the circumstances. "Oh, to what low estate have I fallen! A mere country bumpkin—I, who once played Hamlet!"

The others were recovering their spirits, now that the danger was over. Sandy and Russ followed the trail of the bull through the corn, and soon they had him before the gate of his own enclosure.

"That gate is open!" exclaimed the young farmer. "I don't see how it happened. There is something wrong here."

The bull was driven in, and then an examination disclosed the fact that the lock of the gate had been broken; by a stone, evidently, for a shattered rock lay on the ground nearby.

"This is strange," murmured Sandy. "Someone has done this on purpose. I don't like it—after what happened the other night."

"What was that?" asked Russ.

"Why, Mr. Pertell and I saw a suspicious-looking man out in the road, and we chased him," and he told of the circumstance.

"And you think he broke this lock to let the

bull out?" asked the moving picture operator.

"Well, he might have, but I can't think what his object would be, unless he wanted to spoil some of your moving pictures. Have you got any enemies?"

Russ thought of Simp Wolley and Bud Briskett, who had tried to get his invention, as told in the preceding volume, "The Moving Picture Girls," but they were in jail, as far as he knew. Clearly there was some mystery here, but it was not to be solved at once.

The gate was made as secure as possible, and Sandy said he would get a new lock that day.

"I reckon you folks don't want old Nero buttin' in on you again," he said to Russ.

"Indeed we don't!" answered the young operator. He was puzzled over Sandy's suggestion as to whether or not some enemy had loosed the dangerous animal.

A little later the end of the interrupted scene was filmed again, and then the actors and actresses were at liberty for the rest of the day.

"I declare, Laura!" exclaimed Miss Pennington, "I'm so nervous about that bull that I don't want any more farm plays."

"Me, either," returned her chum. "But really, the summer is a bad time to change. I think we'll have to stay with Mr. Pertell; but I can't bear

this company since those DeVere girls came in."

"Nor can I. They give themselves such airs!"

Which was manifestly unfair to Ruth and Alice, but neither Miss Pennington nor Miss Dixon was over-burdened with fairness.

At first Russ had an idea of speaking to Mr. DeVere about Sandy's theory concerning who might have let loose the bull; but, on second thoughts, he decided not to. The actor had not been so well of late, his voice troubling him considerably, though he managed to go through his parts with credit.

"I'd tell Ruth or Alice," reflected Russ, "only I don't like to bother them. They helped me save my patent, and they know how to do things in an emergency. But I guess I'll wait."

For the next day Mr. Pertell had planned a little drama which gave Mr. Bunn a chance to appear in his favorite roles—some Shakespearean characters. The plot, or at least the first part of it, had to do with Mr. Bunn coming up to the farmhouse in a frock coat, and his favorite tall hat. He was to assume the character of a theatrical man, who, after obtaining board at a country home, fell in love with the daughter of the house through teaching her some roles from Shakespeare's plays, several characters of which Mr. Bunn himself was to assume.

All was ready for the first part of the play, and Russ began filming the initial scene, where the actor comes up the gravel walk leading to the Apgar farmhouse. Mr. Bunn had given his silk hat an extra brushing, and it glistened bravely in the sun. To make the scene contain a little more life, Mr. Pertell had stationed Mr. Switzer at one of the front flower beds, with a garden hose to spray the blooms.

Up the walk came the actor, grave and dignified. Russ was grinding away at the handle of the moving picture camera.

Suddenly a dog wormed his way in under the hedge from the road, and, probably meaning no mischief, ran for Mr. Switzer, barking joyously, and leaping about.

"Hi dere! Look out, you! Don't you nip my legs!" cried the German. He sprang to one side, and, naturally, forgot all about the spurting hose he held.

In an instant the stream was directed full at Mr. Bunn, deluging him with water, which descended in a shower on his precious silk hat, the drops falling from the brim copiously.

"Here! What—what do you mean? You—you——" began the Shakespearean actor, and then his words were muffled, for the stream from the hose struck him full in the mouth!

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE OLD BARN

"QUICK, Russ! Get that!" cried Mr. Pertell, with a laugh. "Don't miss a single motion."

"Do you mean it?" cried the astonished operator. He had ceased, for a moment, to grind on the handle, for he supposed the scene was spoiled.

"Surely I mean it!" cried the manager. "I'll change this and make a comic film of it. Go on, Switzer. Soak him some more! Use that hose for all its worth!"

"Vot! You means dot I vet him all ofer?"

"Certainly I do. Wet him well!"

"I—I protest! I shall not permit——" began Wellington Bunn, but again he was silenced by the volume of water in his mouth. He waved his arms about wildly. He took off his silk hat, probably intending to protect it, but Mr. Switzer had now fully entered into the spirit of the affair, and sent a stream into the hat, filling it as he would a pail.

"Oh, this is awful! This is terrible! I must protest——"

Swish! went the water into his mouth again, and his protest was silenced.

"Go on!" encouraged Mr. Pertell. "This is great! This will make a fine comic film. Soak him thoroughly, Switzer."

"Oh, yah! Sure, I soak him goot!"

"And you, Mr. Bunn! Don't get so far over. You'll get out of range of the camera. Can you film him, Russ?"

"Surely. I'm getting every bit of it."

"That's right! We need every move. A little more life in it, Mr. Bunn! Act as though you didn't like to be soaked!"

"Like it! Of course I don't like it!" cried the actor. "I—hate it! And my hat—my silk hat——"

Again the relentless stream of water stopped him.

"I'll buy you a new hat!" promised Mr. Pertell, choking with laughter. "This is worth it! Lively, Mr. Bunn! Jump around a little. Switzer, don't miss him, but don't wet the camera. And that dog! Get him in it, too!"

"Vot! Maybe he bites my legs yet already!" objected the German. "I likes not dot beast! Und my legs——"

"Oh, I'll get a doctor if he bites you!" promised the manager. "See him get into the action! This will be a great picture. I'll have to get a story that it will fit in."

But at last even the enthusiastic manager was satisfied with the water scene, and he allowed the almost exhausted Mr. Bunn a rest.

"Look at me—look at me!" groaned the actor, as he gazed down at his suit, which dripped water at every point.

"Wait now; don't go away!" objected Mr. Pertell. "I want to get you in another scene now. Come around to the barn."

"What! Film me in this water-soaked suit!" protested Mr. Bunn.

"Certainly. I am going to make a whole reel of you."

"But my hat! Look at my hat! Ruined! Utterly ruined!"

"All the better. I want you in the character of a broken-down actor now, and you wouldn't look the part with a new and shiny tile. Put a couple of dents in it, Mr. Bunn!"

"Oh, you are heartless! Heartless!" cried the actor, as he completed the demolition of his cherished headpiece.

"Isn't it killing, Ruth?" asked Alice, who had come out with her sister to see the fun.

"Funny, yes. But I feel rather sorry for Mr. Bunn."

"Oh, he's getting paid for it. And it's so warm to-day that I almost wish Mr. Switzer would turn the hose on me!"

"Alice DeVere!"

"Well, I do! It is very warm. It must be terrible in the city. Come on out to the barn, and let's see what the next act will be."

The next scene, which Mr. Pertell had thought of on the spur of the moment, required Mr. Bunn to fall into the horse trough, and the actor, after strenuously objecting, finally yielded. He fell into the big hollowed-out log that served to hold the water for the farm animals, making a mighty splash as the camera clicked.

Then came other scenes that, later, would be added to and made into a short reel of "comics." Horse-play though it was, the manager knew that it would at least round out a program, and cause roars of delight from the children, who must be catered to as well as the grown-ups.

"Well, I think that will do for the time being," said Mr. Pertell at length. "You may go and get dry, Mr. Bunn, and, later, we will film the original play, where you come to the farmhouse and do the Shakespearean scenes."

"That will be a relief from this buffoonery,"

remarked the actor. "But how am I to do it in—this?" and he held out the silk hat, now much the worse for what it had gone through.

"Oh, I'll supply a new hat. Trot along and get dried out. I guess you'll have to have your suit pressed. Possibly there is a tailor in the village."

Mr. Bunn went off by himself, rather sulkily. Mr. Switzer was in high good humor at the fun he had had with the hose.

"Good joke!" laughed Paul. Then he made his way to the side of Alice, and made an engagement to walk to the village with her that evening.

"This is the barn I intend to burn in one of our big rural plays," said Mr. Pertell to Mr. De Vere, who, with his daughters, had strolled out to the ancient structure.

"What sort of a scene will it be a part of?" asked the actor.

"A rescue. One of the young ladies—or possibly two of them—will be saved from the burning barn. The play is not completed yet, but I have that much of it worked out. Let us look at the interior and see how it is suited to our needs."

As the little party entered they heard, off in one corner, a noise as though someone was running across the sagging floor, which contained many loose boards.

"Who is there?" called Mr. Pertell, suddenly, while Ruth and Alice drew back, close to the side of their father.

There was no answer.

"I'm sure I heard someone," said Mr. Pertell.

"So did I," agreed Alice. "Perhaps it was a cow or a horse."

"No, the old barn is not in use," returned the manager. "I think we had better tell Sandy——"

"What is it you want to tell me?" asked the young farmer himself, as he appeared in the doorway.

"We heard someone in the barn," explained the manager. "We were looking at it, to get ready for our moving picture play, and we evidently surprised someone. Does anyone stay here?"

"No, and I've told the hired men to keep out, for I thought maybe they might disturb something, and spoil it for you."

"And no animals are in here; are they?" asked Mr. DeVere.

"No, not a one," replied Sandy.

"But I heard someone!" declared Mr. Pertell. "Hark! There is the sound again!" he cried, and they all heard a noise as of a heavy body falling.

CHAPTER IX

THE RESCUE

"OVER this way!" cried Mr. Pertell, making a leap toward a distant corner of the barn, which was in deep shadow. "The noise was over there."

"I think it was there," exclaimed Sandy, pointing toward the opposite corner.

"Come, girls, I think you had better go out," suggested Mr. DeVere to his daughters. "There may be trouble."

"I'd like to see it," said Alice, with a laugh.

"Oh, how can you?" exclaimed Ruth. "Come away, dear!"

"Well, I suppose I've got to," and Alice actually sighed. Her "bump of curiosity" was very well developed.

Following each his own belief as to where the noise had come from, Mr. Pertell went to one corner, and Sandy to the other. Mr. DeVere took his daughters outside, and bade them go on toward the house.

"But where are you going, Daddy?" asked Alice, as he turned back.

"They may need help," he replied.

"Oh, I wish we could go!" pleaded Alice. "At least let us stay here and watch!"

"Well, not too near," conceded her father.

But it seemed that the search for the cause of the mysterious noise was to be fruitless. Neither Mr. Pertell nor Sandy could find any person or creature, though they looked thoroughly. There were many nooks and crannies in the old structure, for in its day it had been the main barn on the farm. But it had fallen into decay and others had been built.

There were harness rooms, oat and feed bins, a small room where the former owner had done his "tinkering and odd jobs," and many other places where someone might have hidden. But no one could be found. No farm animal had made the noise, that was evident, for Sandy could account for all the larger stock on the place, and it must have been a body of considerable size the fall of which had startled them.

"Could it have been bats flying about?" asked Mr. DeVere.

"No bat was heavy enough to make that racket," said Sandy, "though there are bats in here. I don't know what it could have been."

"A tramp, perhaps," suggested Mr. Pertell.

"It might have been," admitted the young farmer, as he thought of the smashed lock on the bull's enclosure. "We sometimes have them fellers to bother us; but not so much in summer. They're afraid of bein' put to work."

The three men made a more thorough search of the barn, but could find nothing that looked suspicious.

"Whoever it was must either be here yet, in hiding, or else they got away while we were looking around," said Mr. Pertell. "Unless you believe in ghosts, Sandy."

"Nope. Not a ghost do I believe in. And I hope this won't spoil the barn for you folks to get your pictures from."

"Oh, no, it takes more than a noise to scare a theatrical troupe," laughed the manager. "Well, we'll have to give it up, I suppose."

There seemed to be nothing else to do, and the party returned to the house, the girls joining them on the way back.

"After all, it might have been some loose board, or plank, falling down. The place is nigh tumblin' t' pieces," declared Sandy. "But I'll keep a watch around. I don't want any tramps on this place."

"I might use one in a moving picture," said

Mr. Pertell, musingly. What he could not use in a moving picture film was small indeed. "I believe that would make a good scene," he went on. "A tramp comes to beg at the farmhouse. He is told that he must saw a lot of wood, or do something like that. Then, let me see—yes, I'll have him eat first, and then refuse to saw the wood. He thinks the lady of the house is home alone. But he makes a mistake, for she proves to be one who has taken physical culture lessons, and she is a match for the tramp. She stands over him until he saws all the wood.

"That ought to go. I'll cast Mrs. Maguire for the strenuous lady, and Mr. Sneed can be the tramp. He has a sour enough face. That's what I'll do!"

"I can ust imagine Mr. Sneed in that rôle," said Alice to Ruth, with a laugh. "He won't like that a bit!"

"I suppose not. Still, we have to do many things in this moving picture business that we don't like."

"I like every bit of it!" Alice declared. "I think it's all fun!"

"I wish I had your happy way of looking at things!" sighed Ruth. "It is a great help in getting through life."

"Why don't you practice it?" Alice asked.

"It's easy, once you start. There are so many funny things in this world."

"And so many sad ones!"

"Bosh!" laughed Alice. "Excuse my slang, sister mine, but you ought to read fewer of those romantic stories, and more joke books. Oh, there goes Paul, and with a fish pole, too. I'm going with him!"

"He hasn't asked you!"

"What of it? I know he'll be glad to have me. Oh, here comes Laura Dixon after him. I'm going to get there first. Paul! Paul!" Alice called, "can't I go fishing, too?"

"Of course!" he cried, his face lighting up with pleasure. "Come along. I've got an extra line and hooks in my pocket, and we can cut a pole along the stream. Come along."

He did not see Miss Dixon, who was behind him, but she saw Alice and heard what was said. For a minute she paused, and then, with a rather vindictive look on her face, turned back.

"Alice!" called Ruth, "I'm not sure father would want you to go. It is getting near supper time."

"Oh, you tell him I just had to go, Ruth dear!"

Mr. DeVere, with Sandy and Mr. Pertell, had gone on ahead.

Ruth shrugged her shoulders. There was little

she could do with Alice, once the younger girl had set her mind on anything. And, really, there was no harm in going fishing with Paul. The favorite spot was not far from the farmhouse, and within view of it.

"It's fine of you to come!" said Paul, as he walked along over the meadow with the laughing, brown-eyed girl. "I'm sure we'll have good luck."

"I'm never very lucky at fishing," said Alice. "But I'll watch you."

"No, you've got to fish, too. I'll cut you a light pole."

"And will you bait my hook—I don't like to do that."

"Surely I will."

They walked on, chatting of many things, and as they reached the fishing hole—a deep eddy on the overhanging bank of which they could sit—they saw Russ Dallwood, with his camera, going along the opposite bank.

"What are you doing?" called Paul.

"Oh, just getting some odd scenes here and there of farm work. Mr. Pertell wants to work them into some of the plays. There are some men spraying a potato patch over in the next field, to get rid of the bugs. I'm going to make a scene of that."

"All right. Good luck!" called Alice, pleas-

antly. "And, if you like, you can take a fishing scene. Paul and I are going to catch some for supper."

"All right, I'll film you on the way back," laughed Russ.

It was a pleasant summer afternoon, and the bank where Alice and Paul took their places was bathed in the golden light of the setting sun.

"The fish ought to bite well to-day," observed Paul, when he had "rigged up" an outfit for Alice.

"Why is to-day better than any other day?" she asked.

"Because the wind is right. 'When the wind's in the west, the fish bite best,' is an old saying. Sandy reminded me of it when I started out to-day."

They tossed in their hooks, and then waited. The water a little way below the eddy flowed over white stones, flecked here and there with green moss. The stream made a pleasant sound, and formed an accompaniment to the songs of the birds which flitted in and out of the willow trees that lined the stream.

At the foot of the bank, on which sat the two fishers, ran the deep eddy, silent, and whirling about in a circular motion, caused by the impact of the brook against the shore, the waters being

forced back on themselves. It was a quiet, and rather still pool, and was reputed to contain many fine, large fish.

"I—I think I have a nibble," whispered Alice.

"Be careful—don't jerk up too soon," warned Paul. "Yes, there is one after your bait. See your cork float bob up and down."

"Does that show he's sampling it?"

"Something of that sort, yes. Now, pull in!"

Alice was a bit slow about it, for she had not fished much. Paul, fearing the fish would get away, reached over toward her, and took hold of the pole himself.

As he did so he felt the part of the shelving bank on which they were sitting give away.

"Look out! Throw yourself back!" he cried to Alice. But it was too late, and the next instant they both found themselves sliding down in a little avalanche of earth and stones—into the deep eddy.

"Hold your breath!" Alice heard Paul cry as a last direction, and she obeyed.

The next instant she felt herself in the water, and it closed over her head.

Alice could swim, and, after the plunge into the stream, she did not lose her head. She knew she would come up in a second, even though hampered by her clothes. Her only fear was lest she

be entangled in the fish-line. And in another second she knew this was the case. She could feel her feet bound together. But her hands were free, and she had seen expert swimmers make their way through the water with their feet purposely bound.

She struck out with her hands, and found herself rising. Her lungs seemed ready to burst for want of air, for she had not had time to take a full breath.

Then her head shot up out of water, and she could breathe. She shook her head to get the water from her eyes, and saw Paul striking out toward her.

"I'll get you!" he cried, and then he uttered an exclamation of horror, for a log of wood, coming down stream, struck Alice on the head, and all grew black before her.

She felt herself sinking again, and tried to strike out to keep her head above the water, but it seemed impossible. Then she felt herself grasped in a strong arm, and she realized that Paul had come to her rescue.

At the same moment she dimly heard, in her returning consciousness, a voice crying something from the opposite shore.

CHAPTER X

THE BARN DANCE

ALICE fought back with all her strength the inclination to faint, and forced her brain to compel her body to do its work. She did her best to aid Paul in the rescue, but he was having a hard struggle. For Alice was rather heavy, and her feet, entangled as they were with the fish line, were of no aid. Then, too, the blow on her head had not been a light one, though it developed later that her heavy hair had prevented the log from bruising her.

"I have you! Don't worry! I'll save you!" she could hear Paul murmuring in her ear. Then her head cleared, and she was able to recognize the voice and make out the words of someone on the opposite bank, toward which Paul was swimming with his burden.

For the voice was the voice of Russ Dalwood, and his words sounded strangely enough under the circumstances.

"That's it! Come right over here!" the young

moving picture operator called. "I'm getting a dandy film! That's it, Paul, a little more to the left! That's the finest rescue scene I ever got! It's great acting!"

"Why—why you—you don't mean to say you're *filming* us!" cried Paul, for he was now in shallow water and could stand upright, holding Alice in his arms.

"Of course I'm filming you!" exclaimed Russ. "Do you think I'd let an act like this get past me? Not much!" and he continued to grind away at the crank of his machine, which he had hastily set up on the edge of the stream, where he commanded a good view of those in the water.

"But this isn't acting!" said Paul, ready to laugh, now that the danger was over. "This is *real!* Alice fell in, and I went in after her. It's the real thing!"

"Great Scott!" cried Russ. "I thought you were rehearsing for some play, and as I came along I thought I might as well get the scene, even if it was only a rehearsal. For I had plenty of film left, and sometimes the rehearsal comes out better than the real thing. And so it was an accident?"

"Of course it was," answered Paul. "But as long as you've got it on the film I suppose there's no help for it."

"It's a fine scene, all right," went on Russ, "and Mr. Pertell can work it into some of his plays." He ceased operating the camera now, as Paul and Alice were too close.

"Are you much hurt?" asked the young rescuer, anxiously, as he looked for a grassy spot whereon to place his burden.

"No—no," returned Alice, "I was more frightened than hurt. Will you please cut that line?" she asked, pointing to the tangle of the fish cord around her feet.

In an instant Paul had out his knife, and cut the string.

"Well, you two are pretty wet," said Russ. "How did it happen?"

"The bank gave way with us," explained Paul. "It's too bad, Alice. That dress is spoiled, I'm afraid," he added, ruefully.

"It doesn't matter," she answered. She could laugh now, but she could not repress a shudder as she looked back at the deep water of the eddy. They were on the other side of the stream now.

"It was an old one, Paul," Alice went on, "and I can save it to do some more water-scenes with. For probably, after Mr. Pertell hears that Russ has the basis for a drama with someone in it being saved from drowning, he'll want the

rest, and we may have to do some more swimming."

"I wouldn't mind in the least," he said; "but next time I hope, for your own sake, you don't get entangled in a fish line."

"That was pretty risky," said Russ. "But you two had better be getting back to the farmhouse now, and into some dry things."

"Indeed, yes," agreed Alice. "I'm sure I must look like a fright. Papa will be so worried, and Ruth, too. I wish I could slip in the back way so they wouldn't see me until I had time to change."

"I'll manage it," spoke Russ. "I'll go on ahead, and if any of our folks are in the back I'll bring them around to the front and hold them there while you slip in. I guess, Paul, you don't care to be seen in that rig; do you?"

"I should say not! That water was certainly wet!"

He had taken off his coat and was wringing it out, while Alice managed to get some of the water from the lower part of her skirts.

"Then you aren't going to swim back?" asked Russ.

"I should say not!" exclaimed Paul, with energy. "Isn't there a bridge somewhere around here, where we can cross?"

"About half a mile down," answered Russ. "I came that way."

"Are you sure you're all right, and able to walk, Alice?" Paul inquired, anxiously. "If not, I could go for a carriage. That is, if you will wait."

"Of course I can walk," she answered, promptly, as she tried to arrange her hair in some sort of order.

"Don't worry about that," said Paul, quickly. "It looks nicer that way."

"As if I would believe that!" she challenged. "Well, if we're going, let's go. Don't forget, Russ, what you promised about getting us in the rear entrance. I wouldn't have Miss Pennington and Miss Dixon see me this way for anything—I'd never hear the last of it!"

"Does your head hurt?" asked Paul, coming closer to examine the spot where the floating log had hit Alice.

"Just a little," she admitted. "It's lucky, though, that my hair is so thick."

They set off, Paul and Alice following Russ, who went on ahead with his moving picture camera.

"I certainly have a fine film," he said, "but I don't believe I would have taken it if I had known it was the real thing in the way of a

rescue. I'd have jumped in and given a hand myself."

"It was very good of you, Paul," murmured Alice, but when he looked into her eyes she turned her own gaze away.

"I—I wouldn't have missed the opportunity of saving you for—for anything," he said, softly.

On the way to the farmhouse, over the bridge and along the country road, a few passing farmers turned to gaze curiously at the two dripping figures, and one grizzled man, seeing the camera Russ carried, and knowing moving picture actors were at Oak Farm, said, loudly enough to be heard:

"Wa'al, by hickory! Some folks is purtty hard put t' airn a livin' now-a-days! Jumpin' in th' water t' have pictures made of 'em. G'lang there!" and he drove on with his bony horse and ricketty wagon.

"You see, he thought the same thing that I did," laughed Russ.

The young moving picture operator was able to draw around to the front of the farmhouse those of the theatrical company who were near the rear, and he managed to keep them there until Paul and Alice had a chance to slip in the side door, and get to their rooms unnoticed. Ruth

however, saw Alice, just as she entered the apartment they shared.

"Oh, my dear girl—you're all wet!" Ruth exclaimed.

"You generally get that way when you fall into the water," remarked Alice, calmly. Then she told of the accident.

"Oh, what a narrow escape!" breathed Ruth, sinking into a chair. "You quite frighten me!"

"You need not be frightened—now—it's all over," and Alice was quite cool about it.

Nothing worse than a slight headache followed her experience in the brook, but as much fuss was made over her, and as many kind inquiries made, after the story became known, as though she had been seriously injured.

Mr. Pertell, after duly saying how sorry he was at the occurrence, expressed his satisfaction over the fact that Russ had made a film of the happening, and at once set to work to devise a plot and play in which it would fit. As Alice had guessed, he had to have other water scenes, and some in which a boat figured, and Paul and Alice were called on again to go through some "stunts," on the mill stream. Thus a pretty little play was made out of what had been an accident. And, more often than once is that really done in the moving picture world.

Rather quiet days followed at Oak Farm. A number of rural plays were acted and filmed, and word came back from New York, where the first films had been sent for development and printing, that the reels were most successful. The one where Mr. Bunn was wet with the hose was particularly good, so said Mr. Pertell's agent.

"But I'll never go through such a thing again," declared the Shakespearean actor.

The affairs of the Apgar family did not improve with time. Squire Blasdell paid several visits to the farm, and one day, seeing Sandy looking particularly gloomy, Ruth asked him what the trouble was.

"The squire is gettin' ready to sell off the farm," he replied. "He's goin' t' foreclose that mortgage. I've tried all the ways I know to raise that four thousand dollars; but I can't!"

"I wish we could help," said Ruth, sympathetically, as she thought of the days of their own poverty, when everything seemed so black.

"I don't reckon anyone can help us," said Sandy. "If only we could find Uncle Isaac's money, and get what belongs to us, we'd be all right; but I guess we can't."

Preparations were under way for a barn dance, which was to be part of a scene in one of the farm plays Mr. Pertell had planned. In order to

make it as natural as possible a number of the country folk living near Oak Farm had been asked to take part. Young and old were invited, and all were delighted to come and "have their pictures took." Thus the original theatrical company would be much augmented on this occasion.

The affair was to take place in the old barn, which, later, would be burned in the great drama. And this barn was selected as the dance was to take place at night. For this good illumination would be needed, and special magnesium lamps were sent out from New York, to be lighted inside the barn. In order to run no chances of burning one of the good farm buildings the old one, which now practically belonged to Mr. Pertell, was taken.

"That barn dance will be fun," said Alice to Ruth, the evening on which it was to take place. "There's going to be a country fiddler. Come on out and let's look at the decorations. Sandy has hung up long strings of unshelled ears of corn. It looks just like a real country barn now, for he's moved some of his machinery into it, and there's going to be a real cow there!"

"Mercy, I'm not going to take part, then!" cried Ruth, nervously. "I'm afraid of cows."

"Silly! This one will be tied. And you've got one of the principal parts. You're to dance

with the young son of the rich farmer, and fall in love with him, and I'm to be the jealous one, and all that sort of thing, you know."

"Yes, I know. Haven't I been studying my part for the last week? But I know I'll never do that Virginia Reel right. Since we learned the new dances I've forgotten all the old ones."

The two sisters went out to the old structure, but it seemed deserted. They looked in and saw how well Sandy had arranged it to make an effective picture for the camera.

"Come on," invited Alice, humming a tune.

Ruth advanced toward her sister, to take a dancing position, when a noise startled the girls. It was the same sort of noise they had heard before, when their father, Mr. Pertell and Sandy had made an unsuccessful attempt to learn the cause of it.

"What's that?" gasped Ruth.

"I—I don't know," whispered Alice. But she did know—it was that same strange sound, as of a heavy body falling. And this time there was a groan—the girls were sure of this.

Without another word they ran out of the barn, hand in hand toward the farmhouse, intending to give an alarm. And, as they got outside, they saw, running off in the dusk, across the fields, a man who limped as he sped onward.

CHAPTER XI

THE RUNAWAY MOWING MACHINE

"Look!" gasped Ruth.

"It was that man—hiding in the barn! Who can he be?" asked Alice, pausing a moment.

"Don't stop! Come on!" commanded Ruth, in fear.

"But we ought to see who it is," insisted the younger girl. "Or at least watch where he goes. Sandy ought to know."

"Well, we'll go tell him; but don't stand and watch that man. He might do you some harm."

"How could he—away off there; and he's running away, besides," spoke Alice. "I think I would know him again. I had one glimpse of his face, as he turned. It was a mean, cruel-looking face, too."

"It wasn't one of those men who tried to get Russ's patent; was it?" asked Ruth.

"No, neither one of them was lame. And they are both locked up, I think. This is some

other man. There, he's gone—at least I can't see him any more."

Either a depression in the field over which he was running, or some hollow between hummocks, now hid the man from view. Then, too, night was falling, and the shadows were dusky.

"We had better go and give the alarm," said Ruth, pulling gently on her sister's arm, to urge her forward. Together they hastened to the house, where, pantingly, they told what they had seen and heard.

"Some tramp, likely," said Sandy, as catching up a club he ran toward the barn. Russ, Paul, and some of the other male members of the theatrical company followed. Alice wanted to go also, but Ruth would not let her.

Nothing came of the search, however, though it was carried far afield. The men came back soon.

"Some tramp, sure," reaffirmed Sandy. "This part of th' country is getting too thick with 'em. Something will have to be done. But I don't see where he could have hidden himself. You say the noise was just like the one you heard before?"

"The same," answered Alice, "and it sounded in the same place—just as if someone had fallen, and then came a groan."

"Maybe the man did fall and hurt himself," suggested Ruth. "And that, likely, was what made him limp."

"Well, I wish he'd limp away from here and stay away," complained Sandy. "I can't see, though, how he managed to hide himself in the barn. There's something strange about that place."

There was, but even Sandy had no suspicion of how very strange the matter was connected with the old structure.

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Ruth, when the chase for the man was over, "I'll be afraid to go to that barn dance now."

"Nonsense!" said Alice. "We'll all be there —and so will Russ," she added with a sly laugh.

"As if that made any difference!" answered Ruth, quickly.

"Oh, it *might*," and Alice seemed very innocent, but there was laughter in her eyes.

In spite of the fact that there were many men and boys at the barn dance, Ruth could not help looking around nervously now and then during the course of the little play, several scenes of which took place in the old building. But there was no further alarm, and no unbidden guests were discerned in the bright glare of the powerful lights.

The scenes went off very well, especially the dancing ones, but the "city folks," as the farmer lads and lassies spoke of the members of the theatrical company, were at rather a disadvantage when it came to doing some of the old-fashioned dances. They had not practiced them in years, particularly Miss Dixon and Miss Pennington.

"The idea of doing the old waltz and two-step," complained Miss Pennington. "It's like running a race."

"Indeed it is, my dear," agreed her chum. "Why can't he let us do the Boston Dip, at least; or the one-step glide. I hate the continuous waltz."

"So do I. Let's try it, when you and I dance together."

"We will!"

But Mr. Pertell, who was overseeing the carrying out of the barn dance, at once cried sharply:

"Hold on there with that camera, Russ! That won't do, Miss Pennington—Miss Dixon. We don't want the new dances here. Not that there is anything the matter with them," he hastened to add, as he saw the defiant looks on the faces of the two former vaudeville players; "but this is supposed to be an old-fashioned country dance,

of the style of about twenty-five years ago, and it would look queer in the films to see the dip and one-step introduced.

"Now do that part over, and keep on with the Virginia Reel. Go ahead, Russ. And everybody get a little more life into this thing. Be lively! Hop about more! Shout and sing if you want to—it won't hurt the film. Go ahead, fiddler!"

Once more the violin wailed out its tune, and the play went on.

"I wonder what I'll have to do next?" complained Wellington Bunn. "This is getting worse and worse. I've had to dance with a big country girl, and every time I take a step she comes down on my foot. I'll be lame for a week."

"It's awful—this moving picture work," agreed Mr. Sneed, who seemed never to get over his "grouch." Then he went on: "It's dangerous, too. Suppose this barn should catch fire? What would happen to us?"

"Ve would get out quick-like, alretty!" said Carl Switzer, as there came a lull in the dance. "Isn't dot der answer?"

"I wasn't asking a riddle," grunted Mr. Sneed. "But something will happen; you mark my words."

"Yah, I hope it happens dat ve haf chicken

for dinner on Sunday!" laughed the German, who always seemed good-natured.

Some other scenes for the play, in which the background of the barn was needed, were made, and then work was over for the evening.

Some of the young persons from neighboring farms asked to be allowed to stay and dance more, and this was allowed. Ruth and Alice, with Russ and Paul, also remained and had a jolly good time, making friends with some of the country girls and boys.

"I've got something new for you, Miss Alice," said the moving picture manager a day or so later, coming up to Ruth and her sister as they sat on the farmhouse porch. Mr. Pertell had some typewritten pages in his hand, and this generally meant that he was getting ready for a new play.

"What is it this time?" asked Alice. "Have I got to fall overboard out of any more boats?" for that had been one of her recent "stunts."

"No, there's no water-stuff in this," answered the manager with a smile. "But can you drive horses?"

"Mercy, no!" cried Alice.

"Oh, I don't mean city horses. I mean these gentle country ones about the farm."

"Oh, I've driven the team Sandy uses to take

the milk to the dairy," confessed Alice. "I could manage them, I suppose."

"Those are the ones I mean," went on the manager. "In this play you are supposed to be a country girl. Your father falls ill and can't cut the hay. It has to be cut and sold to pay a pressing debt, and no hired men can be had in a hurry. So you hitch up the horses to the mower and drive them to cut the grass. It's only for a little while. Think you can do it?"

"Well, I never drove a mowing machine; but I can try. I don't know about hitching up the horses, though."

"Better practice a little with Sandy, then," the manager advised. "He'll show you how."

He gave Alice some written instructions, and then went over Ruth's part in the play. Alice, resolving to learn how to hitch up a team, went out to find Sandy.

It was much easier than she had expected to find it, to attach the slow and patient horses to the mowing machine, and the young farmer took her for a turn with it about the barn yard, so she would be familiar with its operation.

"I think I can do it," said Alice, and two days later, the rehearsals were ended and all was in readiness for making the film of the new rural play.

Alice took her place on the seat of the machine, and began to guide the horses around the edge of the hay field. The mower has a long knife extending out from one side, and as the machine is driven along the wheels work the mechanism that sends this knife—or, rather a series of knives—vibrating back and forth inside a sort of toothed guard, thus cutting the hay or grain.

"All ready, now," called Mr. Pertell to Russ, who was at the camera.

"Go 'long!" cried Alice to the horses, and the animals began their slow walk. For a time all went well, and then a dog, coming from no one knew where, ran at the heels of the horses, barking and worrying them. In an instant one of the steeds leaped forward in fright and the other caught the alarm.

"Hold them in, Alice!" cried Russ. But it was too late, and the horses started to run away, dragging with them the frightened girl on the seat of the mowing machine.

CHAPTER XII

THE MAN WITH THE LIMP

For a moment those watching the making of the moving picture stood as if paralyzed. The horses, frightened out of their usual calmness by the barking dog, were rushing madly down the field, the mowing machine clicking viciously.

"Hold them in! Hold them in! Pull on the lines!" cried Sandy, who was the first to spring to action. He set off on a run toward the horses.

Russ, too, leaping aside from his camera, started off to the rescue, and the others followed. Mr. DeVere was not in this play, and had remained at the farmhouse.

Ruth, however, not being required in this particular scene, though she would come in the film later, had strolled down the meadow toward a little stream, to gather some flowers.

It was in her direction that the frightened horses were running, and as Ruth heard the

shouts, and caught the sound made by the clicking machine, she looked up. Then she saw her sister's danger, and without a thought of her own stepped directly in the path of the oncoming animals, waving up and down, frantically, a bunch of flowers she had gathered.

"Don't do that! Jump to one side!" cried Sandy, who was now nearer the mowing machine. "Look out, Miss DeVere!"

"But I want to stop the horses!" Ruth cried. "I must save Alice!"

"You can't do it that way! They'll run you down, or if they don't the knives will cut you! Jump to one side—I'll try and catch them!"

Ruth had the good sense to obey. She did not really mean to make a grab for the horses, but to stand in their path as long as she could, hoping to make them slacken speed. But she had forgotten about the projecting knives, which, even in their sheath of steel, might seriously injure her.

Alice, white-faced, but still keeping her wits about her, tried to follow the shouted directions, and pull on the reins. But either the horses had the bits in their teeth, or her strength was not enough to bring them to a stop. On they raced, and, as the meadow was a large one, they had plenty of room. Alice might be able to

guide them until they tired themselves out, but there was danger that they would turn into a fence, or that the machine would overturn and crush her under it.

She had half a notion to leap from the iron seat, and trust to falling on the soft earth. But she feared she might become entangled in the reins, or that she would slip, and fall under the flying feet of the horses, or even on the clattering set of knives. And of these last she well knew the danger, for Sandy had warned her of them. So she decided she would keep her seat as long as she could.

Sandy was racing up behind her. Above the thud of the horses' hoofs, and the shrill sound of the clicking knives, Alice could hear him coming on, trying to save her. And how she prayed that he would be in time.

The mowing machine was opposite Ruth now, who had stepped back out of the way of harm. And as Alice passed her sister in the machine the latter cried:

"Oh, Alice! If you should be hurt!" There was the sound of tears in her voice.

Alice did not answer. She had all she could do to look after the plunging horses.

Sandy was not at such a disadvantage in his race as at first it would seem. He was light on

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his feet, and a good runner, though much tramping over plowed fields and rough hills had given him a rather clumsy gait in walking.

But the horses were not built for racing, either, and they were dragging a heavy machine on soft ground. The iron wheels of the reaper were made with projections, to enable them to bite deeper into the earth, and thus turn the gears that operated the knives. And these iron wheels were a heavy drag.

So it is not surprising that, after a comparatively short run, the horses slackened their pace.

"Sit down! I'm comin'!" cried Sandy, and now Alice could hear him panting behind her.

In another instant she felt a jar on the machine, and then someone reached over her shoulder, and took the reins from her hands.

"I'll pull 'em down!" cried Sandy, balancing himself on a part of the machine, back of the seat on which Alice was riding.

The young farmer sawed hard on the lines and this, added to the fact that they had had enough of the hard run, caused the animals to slacken speed. They slowed down to a trot, and then to a walk, finally coming to a halt. And just in time, too, for right in front of them was a big stone fence, into which they might have crashed.

"Oh! Oh dear!" gasped Alice. "I—I think I'm going to faint!"

"Don't! Please don't, Miss!" begged Sandy, more frightened at that prospect, evidently, than he had been at the runaway. "I—I don't know what to do when ladies faint. Really I don't, I—I never saw one faint, Miss. Please don't!"

"All right—then I won't," laughed Alice, by an effort conquering her inclination. But she felt a great weakness, now that the strain was over, and she trembled as Sandy helped her down from the machine. In another moment Ruth and the others came up, and Ruth clasped her sister in her arms.

"You poor dear!" she whispered.

"Oh, I'm all right now," said Alice, bravely. "Perhaps there wasn't as much danger as I imagined."

"There was a plenty," spoke Sandy, grimly.

The dog, the cause of all the mischief, had disappeared. The horses were now quiet enough, though breathing hard, and soon they began to nibble at the grass.

"Well, my dear girl, I'm sorry this happened!" exclaimed Mr. Pertell, as he came running up. "I never would have let you go through that scene if I had dreamed of any danger."

"No one could foresee that this was going

to happen," returned Alice, who was almost herself again. "I'm all right now, and we'll finish the act, if you please."

"Oh, no!" cried Mr. Pertell. "I can't allow it. We'll substitute some other scene."

"No," insisted Alice. "I'm not afraid, really, and I think the picture will be a most effective one. Besides, it is almost finished. We can go on from the point where the horses started to run; can't we?" she asked Russ.

"Oh, yes," he agreed, with a look at the manager, "but——"

"Then I'm going to do it!" laughed Alice, gaily. "I'm not going to back out just because the horses got a little frisky. They will be quiet now; won't they, Sandy?" she asked.

"I think so, Miss—yes. That run took all the tucker out of 'em. They'll be quiet now," and he rather backed away from Alice, as though he feared she might, any moment, put into execution her threat to faint.

"Alice, I'm not sure you ought to go on with this," spoke Ruth in a low voice. "Papa might not like it."

"He wouldn't like me to begin a thing and not finish it," was the younger girl's answer. "I'm not afraid, and I do hate to spoil a film. Come, we'll try it over again," and she pluckily

insisted on it until, finally, Mr. Pertell gave in.

The horses were driven back to the place from which they had bolted and Alice again took her place on the seat of the mowing machine, while Russ worked the camera. This time everything went well, but Sandy Apgar was near at hand, though out of sight of the camera, to be ready to jump on the instant, if the horses showed any signs of fright.

Paul Ardite, too, was on the watch, Ruth noticed. However, there was no need of these precautions. The horses acted as though they had never had any idea of bolting, and the film was finished.

Mr. DeVere looked grave when told of the accident, and after a moment or two of thought remarked:

"I wonder if I had better let you girls keep on with this moving picture work? It is much more dangerous than I supposed. I am worried about you."

"You needn't be, Daddy dear!" exclaimed Alice, slipping her arm about his neck. "Nothing has happened yet, and I'll be real careful. I should be heartbroken if we had to give it up now. I just love the work; don't you, Ruth?"

"Indeed I do; but twice lately, danger has come to you."

"Well, I'll have one more near-accident and then the 'hoodoo' will be broken, as Mr. Sneed would say. Three times and out, you know the old saying has it."

"Oh, Alice!" cried Ruth. "Do be sensible!"

"Can't, dear! I leave that to you. But, Daddy, you mustn't think of taking us out of moving pictures. Why, some of the best and most important of all the farm dramas are to come yet. There's the one with the burning barn —I wouldn't miss that for anything! Please, Daddy, let us stay. You want to; don't you, Ruth?"

"Oh, yes, of course. Only there seems to be so many dangers about a farm. I used to think a country life was calm and peaceful, but things happen here just as in a city."

"Indeed they do," laughed Alice, "only such different things. It's quite exciting, I think. Mayn't we stay, Daddy?"

"Oh, I suppose so," he consented, rather grudgingly. "But take no more chances."

"Oh, I didn't take the chances," laughed Alice. "The chances took me."

During the next few days several farm scenes were filmed by Russ, and a number of partly finished plays were completed, the reels being sent to New York for development. Word came

back that everything was a success, only a few minor errors being made, and these were easily corrected. A few scenes had to be done over.

"But I'm glad it wasn't the one with the hose," said Mr. Bunn, with a sigh. "Really I'd never go through that again."

"Ha! I vould like dot—if I vos on der right side of der hose!" exclaimed Mr. Switzer.

The day had been a busy one, filled with hard work for all before the moving picture camera. When evening came the players were glad of the chance to rest.

"Let's walk down the road," suggested Alice to Ruth. "It is so pretty and restful on the little white bridge, just before you come to the red schoolhouse."

They walked down, arm in arm, talking of many things, and soon were standing on the white bridge that spanned a little stream, which flowed between green banks, fragrant with mint. Here and there were patches of green rushes and beds of the spicy water cress.

"Oh, it's just lovely here!" sighed Ruth. "It is too beautiful. I wish we could share it with some one."

"Here comes someone now, to share it with—a man," spoke Alice, motioning down the road, which was shaded with many trees, through

which the moon was now shining, making patches of light and shadow.

"Perhaps it is some of our friends," murmured Ruth. "I believe Russ and Paul started out for a walk before we did."

"That's not two persons; it's only one," declared Alice as she continued to look at the advancing figure. "And see, Ruth, he—he limps!"

She caught her sister's arm as she spoke, and the two girls drew closer together. The same thought came to both.

Was this the man who had run out of the barn?

"I believe it's the same one," whispered Ruth.

"And I'm perfectly positive," answered Alice. "Oh, Ruth, now is our chance!"

"Chance! Chance for what?"

"I mean we can find out who he is, and perhaps solve the mystery."

"Alice DeVere! We're going to do no such thing! We're going to run back home—that man is coming straight toward us!" cried Ruth, and she began to drag Alice away from the bridge.

Meanwhile the limping figure continued to come along the road, going alternately from bright moonlight to shadow as he passed clumps of trees.

CHAPTER XIII

ON GUARD

PERHAPS Alice really intended to do as she had intimated, and seek to learn, through a direct question, the identity of the mysterious man who seemed to have some object in remaining about Oak Farm. Then, again, she may not. I believe it may not have been altogether clear in her own mind.

At any rate, once Ruth began to show the white feather, and to insist that Alice come away—then, if ever, the younger girl made up her mind that she would do as she had said—really interview the stranger—for, be it known, Alice was rather headstrong when opposed.

But she had no chance to carry out her resolution, for the simple reason that the man himself acted to prevent it.

"Come, Alice! Please come!" pleaded Ruth, almost in a frenzy of fear.

And then the man, catching sight of the girls,

who were in bold relief in the gleam of the moonlight, on the white bridge, and hearing their voices, stood still for a moment in a light patch. Then he turned and went rapidly down the road, limping as he hurried along.

So Alice had no chance to do as she had said she would.

"There he goes!" she exclaimed.

"So I see," responded Ruth with a sigh of relief. "Oh, I'm so glad!"

"I'm not!" declared Alice, and she really thought she meant it. Perhaps she did.

"Oh, Alice!" exclaimed Ruth. "Suppose he had kept on?"

"Just what I wanted him to do. There's nothing very harmful in one man, particularly as there are two of us, and we are so near the house, and on a public road. Oh, it was the best chance we've yet had of finding out who he is, and what he wants around here. And he had to go and —spoil it!" Alice acted as though really grieved.

"We had better go back and tell Sandy or his father," suggested Ruth. "They may want to chase him."

"Not much chance of catching him," replied Alice, ruefully. "See him go, even if he is lame." The man was really making rapid prog-

ress down the road in spite of his halting gait. "But come on," Alice resumed, "we'll tell the men, and they can do as they like."

The two sisters hurried back to the farmhouse, and the message they delivered caused some excitement. For all were more or less interested in the mysterious man.

Sandy, Russ and Paul at once hurried out, and went in the direction where Alice and Ruth had last seen the man. The girls, including Miss Pennington and Miss Dixon, also went out to see what success should attend the efforts of the young men. But it was the same as before—there was no sign of the man. This was not strange, though, considering that he might have slipped off at either side of the road, and gone into hiding in the fields, or in a patch of woodland nearby.

"Guess we'll have to give it up," said Russ, as he and the others turned back. "I'd like to find out who he is, though."

"Do you suppose he could be one of those men who tried to get your patent?" asked Alice. "I mean, he might be disguised."

"I hardly think so," was the answer of the young moving picture operator. "Besides, my patent is fully protected now. They couldn't make anything out of that."

"Then he must be after something on the farm," suggested Paul, who was walking beside Alice.

"There ain't nothin valuable lyin' aroun' here loose," said Sandy, with a short laugh. "I only wish there was. I'd get it myself an' pay off th' mortgage. More likely that fellow is after some of your movin' pictures. Aren't those reels, as you call 'em, valuable?"

"That's so!" exclaimed Paul. "I never thought of that. Maybe he is after some of our films, Russ! We'd better speak to Mr. Pertell about it."

"Perhaps we had. There are some moving picture men mean enough to try to take the ideas of other folks, and they might not be above taking the reels of exposed films, too. We've got some good ones on hand."

Mr. Pertell was a little skeptical about the matter when it was mentioned to him, but he agreed that there was something in the idea, after all, and that it was rather odd for the mysterious man to remain so long in the vicinity of Oak Farm, without disclosing his errand.

"He's a stranger—that's sure," said Mr. Apgar, Sandy's father. "He's a stranger here, for none of th' farmers in these parts know him.

I've heard one or two mention seein' a lame feller going about, as if he had plenty of spare time. It must be this man. But, as Sandy says, we ain't got nothin' he can git. It all belongs t' Squire Blasdell," he added with a rueful laugh. "Or it will after th' mortgage is foreclosed," he finished with a sigh.

The old man looked over at his wife, who was seated in a rocking chair, mending stockings. She was a good sewer, and members of the theatrical troupe had her do work for them, thus enabling her to earn a little money, for which she was very grateful.

The plight of the old people was really pitiful, with the dark shadow of losing their home ever looming nearer. Sandy tried to be cheerful, and several times said that perhaps at the last minute a way might be found to save the farm. But he was not very hopeful. He worked hard—doubly hard, since his father was able to do very little. This made it necessary to hire help, and that left so much less profit on the gathered crops.

"Perhaps it wouldn't be a bad idea to keep watch to-night," suggested Mr. DeVere, when the matter of the mysterious man was being discussed. "That fellow may have designs on some of your farm buildings, Mr. Apgar."

"That's so, he might," agreed the farmer. "Barns has been sot afire afore this."

"Don't talk that way, Father, you'll scare the young folks," chided his wife gently, as she looked at Ruth and smiled reassuringly. "That'll never happen," she added, for, at the mention of the word "fire," Ruth had glanced nervously at the door, as though the limping man stood on the other side of it.

"I'll keep an eye open to-night," said Sandy. "If that fellow comes around I'll be ready for him."

"I'll help you," volunteered Russ, and Paul, too, said he would help in standing guard.

It was arranged that the three men should take turns in keeping watch, and, during the night, patrol the barns and other buildings occasionally, to watch for any signs of the stranger.

At first the girls, and even Mrs. Maguire, were a bit nervous, and this made little Tommy and Nellie, the latter's grandchildren, somewhat timid. Then Mr. Pertell suggested that they all consider their parts in a new drama that was to be started next day, as that would take their minds off the scare.

Save for the occasional barking of a dog, who bayed at the moon, and the lowing of the cattle, there was scarcely a sound, except those of the

night insects. The night passed quietly, and there was no sign of the mysterious man.

"I guess you girls scared him away for good," remarked Paul, at the breakfast table.

"I hope so," murmured Alice. "I had one look at his face, and if ever I saw a hard and cruel one I saw it then."

Work and rehearsals of the new play occupied all for the next two days. Several new things in the way of properties were needed, and this kept Pop Snooks busy. One of the things he had to provide was a rickety two-wheeled cart, that was to be hitched to a donkey, one of the farm animals.

"Who's going to ride in that cart?" asked Mr. Bunn, as he strode about the place with the new silk hat which, true to promise, Mr. Pertell had purchased to replace the water-soaked one.

"I think I'll cast Ruth DeVere to ride in the cart," said the manager. "Someone will have to ride the mule, though, and as I want a tall man for that act I think I'll take you, Mr. Bunn. You will black up as a colored man, and——"

"Stop! Stop where you are!" cried the Shakespearean actor, in stentorian tones. "I shall do nothing of the sort. You may consider that I have resigned!"

CHAPTER XIV

AN UPSET

PERHAPS Wellington Bunn was disappointed that Mr. Pertell did not at once beg him to reconsider his resignation, and to stay his parting steps, for the actor had turned aside after issuing his defiance, and started toward the house, as though to carry out his threat, pack up and go back to New York.

But the manager did not call after Mr. Bunn to stay. All he said was:

"Very well, Mr. Bunn, if you resign now, without the two weeks' notice called for in your contract, you need not expect another engagement with me, nor with any of the moving picture associations with which I am connected. I am not asking you to do anything very difficult."

"But to ride a mule! Great Scott! I can't do that, my dear sir!"

"You told me you could ride."

"Yes, a horse, perhaps; but not a mule. Why, a mule kicks!"

"Oh, I don't believe this one will kick," replied the manager. "Anyhow, I want you to ride him. There is to be a comic part to this play, and I look to you to provide it. You will blacken your face and——"

"Black up and take the part of a colored man—me, Wellington Bunn—who has played the classic Shakespeare—do blackface? Never!"

"You forget that Shakespeare's Othello was a colored man, I guess," laughed Mr. Pertell, "and you told me you had played that character."

"So I have, but Othello was a Moor—not a common black-faced comedian. He was brown, rather than black."

"Well, we'll go a few shades darker, and be real black, in your case," suggested Mr. Pertell. "And you'll have to ride the mule. It is necessary to make the scene a success."

Wellington Bunn sighed, as he answered:

"Very well. But when this engagement is over no more moving pictures for me! I am through with them!"

"We'll see," replied the manager, as he went on with his preparations for the new play. Nearly the whole company were to take part in this, and Tommy and Nellie had parts that pleased them very much.

"I'm to drive a little goat cart!" exclaimed

the small lad, "and you're to ride with me, Nellie."

"Oh, that will be fun!" she cried, clapping her hands. "But your goat won't bite; will he?"

"I won't let him bite you, anyhow," promised Tommy, kindly.

Although Mr. Bunn had tacitly agreed to ride the mule, he had many misgivings on the subject, and several times he might have been seen standing near the animal, carefully studying it, as though it were a piece of complicated machinery that had to be mastered in detail.

"Is it a—er—a gentle beast?" the actor asked of Sandy.

"Allers has been," replied the young farmer. "'Hee-haw,' as we call him, ain't never done no harm to speak of."

"He may begin on you," predicted Pepper Sneed, gloomily.

"I wish you wouldn't say such things!" exclaimed the other actor, testily. "You are always looking for trouble."

"Well, you'll get some without looking for it, if you ride that mule," declared the "grouch," as he walked off.

"Yes, and if anything happens, I suppose you'll say 'I told you so!'" remarked Mr. Bunn, with a gloomy countenance.

Preparations for the play went on, and rehearsals were in order. Without blacking his face, which could be done when the play was actually filmed, Mr. Bunn gingerly rode the mule. He made as much of a success of it as was possible. And certainly Hee-haw showed no signs of obstreperousness.

Ruth rode in the curious old cart, which Pop Snooks had made from material found about the farm. She was to represent a country maid of a generation past—and very pretty she looked, too, in her wide skirts and poke bonnet, covered with roses. Quite in contrast to the long and lanky figure Mr. Bunn, who in a nondescript suit, rode the mule that drew the cart, after the fashion of an English postillion. The play was a comic one. without much rhyme or reason, but it was found that audiences occasionally liked things of that sort, so the films were made.

The day for the humorous film had arrived, and all went well until the scene came with the mule. Even the first part of that was successfully taken, though Mr. Bunn kept muttering to himself over the fact that he had to blacken his face.

But he rode the beast, which certainly did nothing out of the ordinary, though Mr. Sneed, with his usual gloomy forebodings, confided to Pop

that the beast had a wicked look in his eyes.

Ruth had ridden in the cart along the country road and had alighted from the vehicle, her part being over. Then, just as Mr. Bunn was about to get off the mule's back a bee, or some other insect, stung the animal.

With a "Hee-haw!" worthy of his name the mule lashed out with his hind feet and, in an instant, the frail cart that Pop Snooks had constructed was kicked to bits. It was lucky that Ruth was out of it.

As for Wellington Bunn, he fell forward on the mule's back when the animal kicked out, and there, holding on tightly, the actor clung, while the beast dashed off down the road, dragging behind him the shafts and a small part of the cart.

"There he goes! I knew something would happen to him!" cried Mr. Sneed. "To-day is Friday!"

"Oh, he'll be hurt—maybe killed!" cried Ruth, for, in spite of his rather too-tragic airs, Mr. Bunn was liked by all.

"I guess he won't get hurt much!" exclaimed Sandy. "Hee-haw never runs far, an' he never did such a thing before."

However, all the men ran down the road to see the outcome of the happening to Mr. Bunn, and to lend help, if necessary.

On ran the mule, seemingly not slackening speed, and to his neck, so that he should not fall off, clung the actor. His long legs flapped up and down, and swayed from side to side, while his cries of wild distress floated back to his friends.

"Stop him! Don't let him run! Grab him, somebody!" pleaded Mr. Bunn. But there was no one who could stop the animal.

However, the ride was not destined to be a long one. The mule ran along the highway, leaped a roadside ditch, and then stopped short in front of a grassy bank. So sudden was the halt that Mr. Bunn shot over the animal's head, his hold around the neck being broken, and he was thus neatly upset, coming down amid the luxurious growth of grass.

He sat there dazed for a moment, his face being now curiously streaked, for some of the powdered carbon had rubbed off on the mule's neck. As for Hee-haw, he began quietly cropping the grass, as if he had done his part of the entertainment.

"Oh, if I had only been able to get that on the film!" cried Russ, as he and the others ran up. "Maybe we can get him to do it over again, Mr. Pertell."

"What—do that again! Never! I resign here

and now!" exclaimed the actor. "I am through with the moving picture business forever!"

But as he had often said that before, and as he was in the habit of resigning at least once every day, no one took him seriously.

"Are you hurt, my dear sir?" asked the manager, solicitously, as he reached Mr. Bunn's side.

"If I am not, it is not due to you," was the retort. "But I believe I have escaped with my life."

He arose gingerly, and discovered that he had not even a scratch. The soft grass had saved him from everything but a jolt.

"I never knew Hee-haw to act so before," said Sandy, as he came up and took charge of the mule.

"Well, he'll never get the chance to act so with me again," declared Mr. Bunn, with great decision. "Now, as soon as I get this detestable black from my face, I am going to New York. I am through with moving pictures."

Mr. Pertell did not attempt to argue with the actor, well knowing that the threat would not be carried out. Nor was it. A little later, when clothed in his accustomed garb, with his tall hat, which he seldom omitted from his costume, Mr. Bunn walked out, studying a new part that he was to take in the next play.

But for several days after that, if anyone said "mule" to him, or even imitated the braying of that beast, Mr. Bunn scowled fiercely and strode off.

In one of the scenes Mr. Pertell needed a number of farm hands to pose in the background, representing a scene in a wheat field, that was being mowed with the old fashioned scythes. Sandy undertook to get the characters, and a number of rather shy and awkward young men presented themselves at Oak Farm one morning.

"Now we'll try this," said the manager, when all was in readiness. "You young farmers are supposed to be working in the wheat field. Just act naturally—as if you were working. Don't pay any attention to the camera. Talk among yourselves, and swing your scythes. My actors will do the main work in front of you. But I want a truly artistic background for the film.

"Now, Mr. Sneed, you and Miss Pennington are the main characters in this scene. You, Mr. Sneed, are supposed to be one of the reapers, and Miss Pennington comes out to bring the workers a jug of lemonade. She also has a letter for you to read. You lean on your scythe as you read it —you know, a nice, graceful pose."

"I know," answered the actor.

"And you, Miss Pennington, you are supposed to be in love with one of the young farmers."

"Me! Me!" cried several of the lads Sandy had engaged.

"Now, not all at once, please!" begged Mr. Pertell, with a smile. "I appreciate your interest in Miss Pennington, but this must be worked out according to the scenario."

He went on to explain how he wanted the action carried out, and Russ was ready with the camera.

"Attention!" called the manager, as he stepped back to get a general view of the scene. "That will do, I think," he added. "Go!" he cried, and the action of the play was on, Russ clicking away at the camera.

First the reapers were shown, swaying as they walked along, each one cutting his "swath," or path, through the standing grain. Mr. Sneed was one of these. Then the view changed, so as to show Miss Pennington, dressed as a country lass, coming along with a jug on her shoulder, and a letter in her hand.

She reached the scene of the mowing, and there was a little "business," or acting, as she handed over the letter. Some of the farmers drank from the jug, and all of them had hard work to keep their eyes from the camera.

"Not that way! Not that way!" cried the manager, as one young reaper took a position directly in front of the clicking machine and stared straight into the lens. "You're not posing in a beauty contest. Go on with your reaping, if you please, young man!"

"I can cut a foot or so out," said Russ. "That won't spoil the film."

"Now then, Mr. Sneed, lean your arm on the scythe, and read your letter," directed the manager. "Miss Pennington, you stand off a little to one side, and talk to one of the reapers. The rest of you swing your scythes."

The action went on, and Mr. Sneed, taking as graceful an attitude as was consistent with his character, began to read the missive, which would be photographed, much enlarged, later, and thrown on the screen for the audience to read.

Made nervous by something to which they were unaccustomed, the farmer-actors were perhaps a little self-conscious. One of them, swinging his scythe, came too near Mr. Sneed. In an instant he had knocked from under the actor's arm the crooked scythe handle on which Mr. Sneed was leaning, and the next instant the "grouch" went down in a heap, fortunately falling in such a way that he was not cut by the sharp blade.

CHAPTER XV

THE LONELY CABIN

"STOP the reel! Hold that, Russ! Everyone keep position! We don't want that spoiled!" cried Mr. Pertell, when he had seen, at a glance, that Mr. Sneed was not hurt. "Hold your positions, everybody!"

This is an order frequently given during the taking of moving pictures, when any accident happens. Often the film will break, while the exposures are being made, and if the actors keep to the places and positions they had when the break occurred, the film can be threaded up again, and mended. Then, later, undesireable parts can be cut out of the exposed part, so that no great harm is done.

For a moment the little accident rather upset the crowd of farm lads, who were not used to such happenings. But the moving picture actors themselves were not unduly alarmed. Russ had stopped operating his camera.

"You're not hurt; are you, Mr. Sneed?" asked the manager.

"Hurt—no! But I might have been! I was sure something would happen to-day, for I saw a black cat as I got up. Well, it's lucky it's no worse. But I wish you'd make those fellows with their big cutters keep farther back, Mr. Pertell. They might slice my legs off. I know some serious accident will happen before the day is over."

"Oh, cheer up!" laughed Russ.

The actor arose, Mr. Pertell cautioned the young farmers about coming too close with their keen, swinging scythes, and the moving picture play went on.

Ruth and Alice DeVere had parts in the little drama, but they were to enact them with a different background, and when Russ finished filming the scenes in the wheat field he went back to the farmhouse to get other pictures.

There appeared to be something unusual going on, for out in the road stood two carriages, and on the porch could be seen Mr. and Mrs. Apgar, and Sandy, with two men. The moving picture actors and actresses who had not gone to the field were also there.

"I wonder what is going on?" said Mr. Pertell.

"Something has happened!" exclaimed Mr. Sneed. "I knew it would—I told you so!"

Hurrying to the porch where the group was, Mr. Pertell heard one of the strangers saying:

"Well, we've got to do it whether you like it or not, Mr. Apgar. Squire Blasdell wants the money on that mortgage, and the only way he can get it is to foreclose. So I've got to post the notices of the sale."

"To think that I should live to see this day!" sighed Mr. Apgar. "My farm to be sold under foreclosure!"

"It is hard, Pa, dreadful hard," said Mrs. Apgar. "But we are honest. We'd pay if we could."

"If only I could find Uncle Isaac's money," sighed Sandy. "Couldn't you give us a little more time, Sheriff Hasell?"

"No, I'm sorry; but I can't," replied the official. "You see this isn't actually selling the farm. We're only going to post notices that it will be sold. That has to be done, according to the law here. It'll be some time though, before the farm is auctioned off to the highest bidder."

"And we can stay here until then; can't we?" asked Sandy.

"Oh, yes, sure, and for a little while after. You see these things take time," the sheriff re-

turned. "It's too bad—I'm sorry, but me and my deputy has to do our duty."

"Go ahead, then," said Sandy, and there were tears in his eyes. "We won't stop you, but it's hard—it's terrible hard—to lose the place we worked so long for, an' all because of some mistake. Uncle Isaac would want us to have that money paw lent him, but he died afore he could tell where he hid it."

The sheriff and his man then went about the farm, posting several notices of the sale on the different buildings. This gave Russ an idea, and he suggested it to Mr. Pertell.

"Why not make a film of this," said the young operator. "Old couple—going to be turned off their farm—foreclosure of mortgage—posting the notices—the cruel creditor—the sheriff and all that. We could make up a good play."

"So we could!" cried the manager. "A good idea, and I'll pay Mr. and Mrs. Apgar for posing for us. It'll give 'em a little extra money."

At first the aged couple would not hear of posing before the camera, but Sandy explained matters to them, and told them they could easily do it. Mr. Pertell promised to pay well, and this finally won them over. The sheriff and his deputy good-naturedly agreed to do their tacking up of the notices in front of the camera, and so an

unexpected film was obtained. It is often that way in making moving pictures. The least germ of an idea often leads to a good play.

The other scenes in "The Loss of the Farm," as the play was to be called, would be made later. For the present it was necessary to go on with the scenes of the drama, part of which had been laid in the wheat field.

Russ put some fresh film in his camera and was ready for Ruth and Alice, who had some pretty little scenes together.

The day was hot, the work was exacting, and when it was over everyone was ready to rest. Russ was perhaps busier than any, for he had to prepare the films to be sent in light-tight boxes to New York for development, arrangement, and printing.

"Let's go off to the woods," suggested Alice to her sister, when they had changed their costumes for walking dresses of cool brown, with white waists. "I declare I just want to get under a tree and lie down on the soft green moss."

"So do I, dear. We'll go up to that little dell which is so pretty—the one where we got the lovely flowers. It is so restful there."

Together the sisters set off, walking slowly, for the air was sultry.

"Don't you want to come, Daddy?" called

Ruth to her father, who was sitting on the farm-house porch.

"No, thank you," he answered. "I have some letters to write."

His voice had grown somewhat stronger under the influence of the pure, country air, and from the fact that he used it very little. But still it was not clear enough to enable him to go back into legitimate theatrical work. And, truth to tell, he rather preferred the moving pictures now. It was easier, even if there was no audience to applaud him.

Ruth and Alice soon reached the edge of the cool woods, and then they strolled slowly along until they came to a little dell—a nook they had discovered one day when out walking.

"Oh, this is delightful!" exclaimed Alice, as she sank down on a bed of moss.

"Yes, it is very soothing to the nerves," agreed Ruth. "Oh, dear!" she suddenly cried, leaping to her feet.

"What is it?" demanded Alice.

"A bug walked right over my shoe!"

"Oh, mercy me!" mocked her sister. "Are you so scared that even a bug can't look at you, sister mine? Why, it's only a lady-bug—very proper to have on one's shoes, I'm sure," she added, as she saw the harmless insect.

"I don't care! I just hate bugs!" cried Ruth. "I wish I had a rug to sit on."

"Oh, you were never meant for the country!" laughed Alice. "Come, sit down, I'll keep the bugs away from you," and she pulled a big fern, which she used as a fan.

The sisters sat and talked of many things, speculating on the identity of the mysterious man and wondering if the Apgars would ever discover Uncle Isaac's missing money and so save the farm.

The day was drawing to a close, and the girls felt that they must soon return to the farmhouse.

"Hark! What's that?" asked Alice, suddenly, after a period of silence. A distant rumble came to their ears.

"Wagon going over a bridge, I should say," replied Ruth.

"More like thunder," Alice went on. "It *is* thunder," she said a moment later, as a sharp clap reverberated through the still air. "Come on, Ruth, or we'll be caught."

They scrambled up from the mossy bed, and hurried from the little glen. But the storm came on apace, and before they were half-way out of the woods there was a sudden flurry of wind, and then came a deluge of rain, ushered in by vivid lightning, and loud thunder.

"Oh, Alice, we'll be drenched—and our new dresses!" cried Ruth.

"Let's get under a tree," suggested the younger girl. "That will shelter us."

"And get struck by lightning! I guess not!" protested Ruth. "Trees are always dangerous in a thunder storm."

"But we must find shelter!" said Alice, as they ran on.

They came to a little clearing in the woods, and pausing at the edge saw a lonely cabin in the midst of it.

"Come on over there!" cried Alice. "They'll take us in, whoever they are, until the shower is over."

Seizing Ruth's hand she darted toward the cabin. Then both girls saw a man open the door and stand in it—a man at the sight of whom they drew back in alarm.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MAN AND THE UMBRELLA

For a moment the man stood in the doorway of the cabin, staring at Ruth and Alice standing there in the drenching rain. They had recognized him at once as the man whom they had seen run out of the old barn—the limping man who had fled down the moonlit road when he espied them on the bridge.

Whether or not he knew the girls, they did not stop to consider. Certainly they were dressed differently than on either of the occasions they had encountered him; but that might not obviate recognition.

"Come—come on back to the woods," whispered Ruth. "We—we don't want to meet him, Alice."

"No, I suppose not," agreed Alice, "and yet," and she seemed to shiver, "we ought not to stand out in this storm when shelter is so near, no matter who that man is."

"Oh, Alice!" exclaimed Ruth.

"Well, I mean it! I am soaked, and you are, too. Besides, that lightning is awful—and the thunder! I can't stand it—come on. I'm sure he won't eat us!"

But the girls were saved any anxiety by the action of the strange man. Alice was trying to draw her sister toward the cabin, and Ruth, torn between a desire to get under shelter, and fear of the man, was hardly able to decide, when the stranger darted back into the cabin, and came out with an umbrella.

"Oh, he's going to offer it to us!" exclaimed Alice. "That is good of him."

But, to her surprise, no less than that of Ruth, the man called out:

"Come in, and welcome, young ladies. You may stay in this cabin as long as you like. The roof leaks in one place, but otherwise it is dry. I have to go away. Come in!"

And with that he put up the umbrella and hurried off, limping through the rain, but never once glancing back at the girls.

For a moment Alice and Ruth did not know what to do or think. The action was certainly strange. And why had not the man come to meet them with the umbrella, while he was about it? There was some little distance to go, from

the fringe of trees where the two girls stood, to the cabin, and this space was open; whereas, by keeping under the leafy boughs they were, in a measure, protected from the pelting rain.

"What shall we do, Ruth?" asked Alice. She wanted to defer to the older judgment of her sister. But Ruth answered:

"I don't know, dear. What had we better do? I'm afraid——"

"And so am I afraid—but I'm more afraid of this thunder and lightning, to say nothing of the rain, than I am of what may be in that cabin, now that the man has so kindly left it to us. I'm going in there, Ruth, and stay until the storm is over."

With that, picking up her skirts, Alice sped across the open space, leaving Ruth to do as she pleased. And, naturally, Ruth would not stay there to be drenched alone.

"Wait for me, Alice—wait!" she pleaded. But there was no need for Alice to delay, since she would only get the wetter, and Ruth was in no danger.

"Come along," called Alice over her shoulder, and Ruth came. The sisters reached the cabin just as a brilliant flash of lightning, with almost simultaneous thunder, seemed to open the clouds, and the rain came down in a veritable flood.

"Just in time!" cried Alice. "We would have been drowned if we had stayed out there. That man has some good qualities about him, at any rate. He was nice enough to give us the use of this place."

"And maybe we're wronging him," panted Ruth, out of breath after her little run, and her hair all awry. "He may be all right, and it is foolish to suspect him of something we know nothing about."

"Perhaps," admitted Alice. "But there is a look in his face I do not like. I can't explain why, but he looks, somehow—oh, I can't explain it, but he looks as if he had been in prison—or some place like that."

"What a strange idea," responded Ruth. "I can't say I think that of him, but I agree with you that there is something repulsive about him. And that seems a mean thing to say, after he has given us the use of the cabin."

"How do we know it was his?" asked Alice. "It doesn't appear to me to belong to anybody. Certainly it isn't very sumptuously furnished!" and she looked about the place in considerable curiosity.

It was devoid of anything in the way of furniture, and only a few rough boxes were scattered about. On a stone hearth were the gray and

blackened embers of a fire, and in one corner was a broken chair.

"It seems to have been deserted a long time," said Alice. "I guess that man was passing and took shelter in here, just as we intended to. But there's another room. We may as well inspect that, and there's another upstairs. That may be a little better. We'll look, Ruth."

"We'll do nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Ruth. "We'll just stay right by the door where we can run, in case—in case anything happens," she finished, rather falteringly.

"Silly!" exclaimed Alice. "There is no one in this place."

"But that man might come back."

"Not likely. Besides, don't you know that it's the worst thing in the world to stand in an open doorway, before a fireplace or in a draft of any kind when there's lightning. Lightning is always attracted by a draft, or a chimney, or something like that."

"Oh, why do you always think of such nervous, scary things?" cried Ruth.

"Because they're true," answered Alice. "And I want to get you into the other room. We might find out something. And if you won't come upstairs, I'll go alone."'

"And leave me down here? I'll not stay!"

"Then come along. We'll investigate. We may find a clue, as they say in books."

Alice drew back from the open door, and started for the inner room. Ruth stood for a moment, uncertain what to do. She looked across the glade, but the strange man was not in sight. He and his umbrella had disappeared into the depths of the woods.

Just then there came another vivid flash of lightning, and such a startling clap of thunder that Ruth, with a little scream, darted back, and, springing across the room, clutched Alice by the arm.

"Oh, I'm so frightened!" she gasped.

"We'll be all right now—in the back room," soothed the younger girl. "Oh, look! I believe that man does live here after all!"

For the room was furnished with some chairs, a table, and in one corner was a cot bed, with the clothes tossed aside as if someone had lately been sleeping there. There was a small stove in the room, and pots, pans and dishes scattered about, as if meals had been recently cooked. A cupboard gave hint of things to eat.

All this the girls took in by means of the rapid flashes of lightning, for it was growing too dark to see well inside the cabin, which was of logs, and with only small windows.

"Yes, he must live here," agreed Ruth. "Oh, I hope he doesn't come back before the storm is over, so we can get away. You'll not go upstairs now; will you, Alice, dear?" Ruth looked pleadingly at her sister.

"No, I guess not," was the answer. "We couldn't see much, anyhow. And if that man really lives here it wouldn't be exactly polite to go about his place without a better invitation than we have. He spoke truly when he called this his cabin."

"Unless he just found it empty and took the use of it without asking the owner," suggested Ruth. "I wish we knew more about him."

"So do I," agreed Alice. "I wonder if he really had to go away in the storm, or whether he knew we would not come in the cabin while he was here, and so made an excuse to leave it to us alone?"

"If he did that it certainly was very kind of him," said Ruth.

"Perhaps he is bashful and shy," observed Alice. "He ran before, when he saw us on the bridge, and now he runs away and leaves us his house—such as it is. Clearly there is some mystery about him. Oh, listen to the rain!"

Indeed the storm was at its height now, and the girls were glad of the shelter of the cabin.

As the man had said, there was a leak somewhere in the roof, and they could hear the steady drip, drip of water falling. But they did not see it, and the cabin seemed quite dry. It was a shelter from the wind, too, which was now blowing fiercely, bending the trees before the might of its blast.

But, like all summer showers, this was not destined to last long. Its fury kept up a little longer, and then began to die away. Gradually the lightning grew less vivid, and the flashes were farther apart. The thunder rumbled less heavily and the rain slackened. The girls went to the entrance room and gazed out.

"We can start soon," spoke Ruth. "It may sound a selfish thing to say, but I wish that man had left us his umbrella. We'll get quite wet going home, for the water will drip from the trees for some time."

"Perhaps he'll come back and offer us the use of it," suggested Alice.

"Don't you dare say such a thing!" exclaimed her sister. "Oh, I wish we were home! I'm afraid daddy will worry."

"I wish there was a fire in that stove," spoke Alice, musingly. "I'd make some coffee, if I could find any. I'm quite chilly. We are wet through, and can't be made much worse by not

having a umbrella. I'm going to look and see if I can find some coffee."

"Alice, don't!" objected Ruth, but her sister was already in the rear room, and, not wanting to be left alone, Ruth followed. But, before either of the girls had time to look about and see if it were possible to kindle a blaze in the old stove, they heard a noise in the room they had just left. It was the patter, as of bare feet, on the wooden floor. Startled, the two gazed at one another. Then they clasped their arms about each other's waists.

"Did—did you hear that?" whispered Ruth.

Alice nodded, and looked over her sister's shoulder toward the door between the two rooms.

Meanwhile the pattering footfalls in the other apartment continued. They seemed to be coming nearer, and there was a panting, as though someone had run far, and was breathing hard.

CHAPTER XVII

IN THE WOODS

"WHAT—what can it be?" faltered Ruth, as she clung to her sister.

"I—I don't know," answered Alice, and her voice was far from steady. "I wish we hadn't come in here."

"So do I!" Ruth confessed.

Nearer and nearer came the footfalls. Now the girls were able to distinguish that they were made by some four-footed beast, and not by a human being, for the sound came in a peculiar rhythm that was unmistakable. Also there could be heard a panting, sniffing sound, that could only be made by some beast.

"Oh, if it's a *bear!*" gasped Ruth.

"Silly!" chided Alice. She was less nervous now, for she realized, with Ruth's remark, that there were no savage beasts in that part of the country.

"Maybe it's only a cat," Alice suggested, after a moment.

"It's too big and heavy for a cat," objected Ruth. "Oh, there it is!" she suddenly cried, pointing to the doorway between the two rooms, and, looking, Alice saw a tawny animal standing looking at them in the fast falling darkness.

"It's only a dog!" cried Alice, in joyous relief. "A fine dog! Come here, sir!" she called, for Alice could make friends with almost any animal.

But this dog, though he barked in a friendly fashion, and wagged his tail as a flag of truce, would not come nearer. He sniffed in the direction of the girls and then, with another bark, turned and ran out toward the entrance door.

"Come on!" called Alice. "It has stopped raining, Ruth, and maybe that dog will follow us home. He'll be fine protection!"

Ruth was not at all averse to having some sort of guardian on the walk through the lonely woods, but when she and Alice reached the outer room the dog, with a last look back, and a farewell bark, trotted off across the glade in the direction taken by the strange man with the umbrella.

"He's gone!" exclaimed Alice, in disappointment. "Come back!" she invited. "Come back, sir!" and she whistled in boyish fashion. But

the dog was not to be enticed, and was soon lost in the woods.

"Maybe he belonged to that man," suggested Ruth, "and came here looking for him. What sort of a dog was it, Alice?"

"A collie. The same kind Mrs. Delamont lost in the train wreck, you know."

"Oh, maybe it was her prize animal, Alice!"

"How could it be? He was lost a good way from here. But it looked to be a fine dog. Shall we go home, now?"

"Yes," agreed Ruth. "We can't get much wetter, and I don't want to stay here any longer. I know daddy will be worried about us."

With a last look about the cabin, wondering what could be the business of the man who stayed there, the girls started off. But they had not taken three steps before they saw, coming toward them from the other side of the clearing, two figures.

"Oh!" cried Ruth, drawing back. "There comes that man, and he's got someone with him."

Alice, too, was startled and a little bit afraid, but a moment later there came a cheerful hail.

"Oh, it's Russ and Paul!" Alice cried. "They have come for us!"

"Thank goodness!" exclaimed Ruth, and a

few seconds later the four young people were together, making mutual explanations.

Mr. DeVere had indeed become worried about his daughters, when the storm arose, and, as they had left word whither they were going, Russ and Paul volunteered to go after them, taking raincoats and umbrellas.

"And here we are!" exclaimed Russ, as he helped Ruth on with her garment.

"And we were never so glad to see anyone in all our lives; were we?" went on Alice, who, in spite of her brave nature, had been considerably unnerved by the events of the last few minutes.

The young men were much surprised when told about the strange man and the dog, and they at once wanted to make an inspection of the cabin.

"Who knows what we might find!" exclaimed Russ.

"Wait until later, then," suggested Ruth. "Please take us home now."

Russ and Paul had no choice, after that, but to take the girls back to Oak Farm.

The rain was over, but the trees still dripped with moisture and the raincoats and umbrellas were very useful. Paul walked with Alice, while Russ kept pace at the side of Ruth. And as the

four walked together they talked of the recent happenings, speculating as to the meaning of them all.

Back in the comfortable farmhouse, clothed in dry garments, Ruth and Alice were inclined to laugh at their scare, which, at the time, had seemed very real.

"I think that man was real kind," said Mrs. Apgar, as she heard the story. "To leave his cabin that way."

"He was, unless he had some object in view," said Sandy. "I'd like to know what his game is. He's got some object hangin' around here, and I'm goin' to find out what it is."

"Was that his cabin?" asked Ruth.

"No, that's an old shack that really belongs on this place," explained Mr. Apgar, "but there's a dispute as to the title, so no one really knows who owns it. 'Tain't much 'count, anyhow. But you say he was livin' in it?"

"He had it partly furnished, at any rate," said Alice. "It could be fixed up and made into a lovely little bungalow."

"Well, you folks kin do that if you like," offered Sandy. "I kin have it fixed so that fellow won't stay there. He's got no rights; only a squatter."

"I think we'd feel safer here," returned Ruth,

with a smile. "That man might come back unexpectedly."

"I think I'll go up there to-morrow and have a look around," suggested Russ. "I'd like to see more of that cabin by daylight."

"And I'll go with you," offered Sandy. "I'm gittin' real interested in this chap."

But when they went up early next morning they found the place deserted, and no signs of the strange man. There was evidence that he had packed up some of his things, for the bed clothing was gone, with some of the cooking utensils the girls had seen in the kitchen.

"He's stolen a march on us," declared Paul, grimly.

"Probably took fright because the girls located his hiding place," said Russ.

"And I reckon he is in hidin' for some reason or other," remarked Sandy. "I wish I could have him arrested!"

"What for?" Russ wanted to know. "I'm afraid you'd have hard work to make a charge that would hold. So far he hasn't done anything that we know of."

"He could be held as a trespasser," spoke Paul. "He was in the Apgar barn; wasn't he?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"That fellow's up to more than jest tres-

passin'," declared Sandy. "He's got some motive, and I'm goin' to find out what it is."

But for the present this was out of the question. The man was gone, and none at Oak Farm knew his whereabouts. The only thing they could do was to wait until he showed himself again.

"But having a dog was a new one," said Russ. "That is, if it was his the girls saw."

But even on this point they could not be sure. They returned to the house, for Russ had to make several films that day.

Several acts of one of the plays were to take place in the woods, and Russ had found a spot, not far from the lonely cabin, where there was the proper background of trees and hills.

Thither the company went that afternoon, and after a little rehearsal, Mr. Pertell gave the word for the real action of the drama to begin.

Miss Pennington and Miss Dixon were in this, as were Ruth and Alice. There was to be a picnic scene, with a campfire at which a meal was to be cooked, and real food had been prepared for the act.

"All ready!" called the manager, when he had looked over the little company, and seen that they were all in their proper positions. "Go ahead, Russ!"

For a time all went well, and then came a scream from Miss Dixon, who jumped up with such suddenness that she upset a pitcher of lemonade over Mr. Switzer.

"Cut that out, Russ!" called the manager, sharply. "We seem to be having all sorts of accidents of late."

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" apologized the actress. "But I—I saw a bug!"

"You usually do in der woods, my dear young lady!" said Mr. Switzer, as he sopped up the lemonade from his trousers with his handkerchief. "Und, if it iss all der same mit you, I vould like to have my oder lemonade on der insides of me und not on der outsides, ef you pliss!"

It took some little time to get matters straightened out, so that the making of the film could proceed. Several scenes were successfully made, and they were ready for the final one, when this time Miss Pennington screamed.

"Another bug?" asked Mr. Pertell, and he was a bit sarcastic over it, for several little things had bothered him that day.

"No, it's a snake! A snake! See, he's coming right for me!" and deserting the scene Miss Pennington made for a broad stump, upon which she jumped, screaming.

"Snake! Call that a snake!" cried Russ, as he picked up a rather large and squirming angle-worm.

"Oh, put it down—the horrid thing!" begged Miss Dixon, who had joined her friend on the stump.

"Poor little thing!" laughed Russ, as he tossed the worm into a clump of leaves. "Go home and tell your folks you scared two brave young ladies!"

"Smarty!" exclaimed Miss Pennington, with a vindictive look at the moving picture operator, who had left his camera when the scene was broken up.

Once again matters were arranged and the taking of the film went on as before. But that was a day destined to be fraught with adventures of more or less moment.

In one scene Mr. Sneed had to pose as a wood chopper, and, to make it more realistic he was to fell a small tree. This action on his part had cost him no little time and trouble, for he was not proficient in the use of the axe. For several days the actor had had Sandy "coaching" him until he could do fairly well.

"'We'll try that tree-cutting scene now,'" said Mr. Pertell, after a bit. "Get ready for that, Russ. And, whatever you do, Mr. Sneed, don't

have the tree fall on the camera. I don't want all the film spoiled."

Soon all was in readiness for the final act of the day. Mr. Sneed swung his axe with vigorous strokes and the keen weapon bit deep into the wood. Alice and Ruth, who were acting with him, went through their parts in the little play.

At times Mr. Sneed would pause to go through some other "business," and then resume his chopping.

"Look out," warned Sandy Apgar, who was one of the characters in the act. "She'll fall in a minute."

"Yes, get from under," advised Russ. "I'll get a good picture of the tree coming down."

Mr. Sneed ran out of the way, as a cracking warned him that the tree was going to fall. It was not a large one, but it had very heavy and thick foliage.

Crash! Down came the tree, and then followed a cry of alarm.

"Ach! I am killet! I am caught under der tree!"

"Great Scott! Another accident!" groaned Mr. Pertell. "This certainly is a hoodoo day!" and they all ran to where Mr. Switzer had been pinned.

CHAPTER XVIII

GOING TO SCHOOL

FORTUNATELY for the German actor, he had been far enough away when the tree came down, so that only the top part of it, consisting of little branches and leaves, fell on him. In fact, he was not even knocked down by the impact, but stood up right in the midst of the foliage, his frightened blue eyes and rumpled light hair standing out from amid the maze of green in a curious fashion.

"Vot for you do dot to me?" demanded Mr. Switzer of the grouchy actor who had chopped the tree. "Dot vos not in the act; vos it, Mr. Pertell?"

"No, but as long as you're not hurt we'll leave it in. It will make a little variety. Why didn't you get out of the way?"

"Nobody tolt me to. I t'ought Herr Sneed knowed vot he vos doin' by der tree yet! Vhy shoult I get der vay oudt?"

"Well, I knew something would happen when I tried to chop a tree," grumbled the author of the mischief.

"As long as it's nothing very bad we'll forgive you," went on the manager.

"Und I forgif him, too," spoke the German. "Only he must now use his axe again und get me out of dis. I am helt fast yet!"

This was true enough, for the branches, though not heavy enough to have caused any injury, were quite thick, and fairly hemmed Mr. Switzer in.

"Better let me lop off a few," suggested Sandy, and they agree that as the chopping would have to be done quite close to the imprisoned one, a more expert hand had better do it.

Sandy quickly had cut a way so the actor could emerge, and at Mr. Pertell's suggestion Russ made moving pictures of it.

"I'll have a new scene written in the play to fit this," the manager said. "Mr. Bunn, I think you might climb that tree over there," and he indicated one within range of the camera.

"Climb a tree! Me!" exclaimed the actor. "What for, pray?"

"Well, I'll have a scene fixed up to indicate that the party gets lost in the woods, and you climb a tree to see if you can spy any landmarks

to lead them out of their plight. Just shin up that tree, if you please, and put your hand over your eyes when you get up high enough to see across the tops of the other trees. You know—register that you are looking for the path."

"I refuse to do it!" cried Wellington Bunn. "To climb a tree is beneath my dignity."

"Then climb a tree and get above it," suggested the manager, drily. "You've got to climb; I want you in this scene."

The tall actor groaned, but there was no help for it. Up he went, not without many misgivings and grunts, for he was not an athlete.

"I say!" he cried, when part way up, "if I fall and get hurt you'll have to pay me damages, Mr. Pertell."

"You won't get hurt much," was the not very comforting answer. "And you won't fall, if you keep a tight hold with your arms and legs. But if you do, there's lots of soft moss at the foot of the tree."

"Oh, this life! This terrible life!" groaned Mr. Bunn. "Why did I ever go into moving pictures?"

No one answered him. Perhaps they thought the reason was that he had outlived his drawing powers in the legitimate drama.

Finally he reached the top of the tree, and

pretended to be looking for a path for the lost ones, while Russ, always at the camera, successfully filmed him.

"That's enough—come on down," ordered Mr. Pertell. Mr. Bunn came down more quickly than he went up, and the last few feet he slid down so rapidly that he scratched his hands, and tore his trousers.

"You'll have to pay for them," he said, ruefully, as he looked at the rent.

"Put it in your expense bill," suggested the manager. "We'll do anything in reason. And now let's get back before anything else happens. Is to-day Friday, the thirteenth?" he asked with a smile, for really a number of occurrences out of the ordinary had taken place. Fortunately, however, none of the accidents was serious, and no films were spoiled.

Several days passed, one or two of them rather lazy ones, for the weather grew hotter and Mr. Pertell did not want to overburden his players. Russ and Paul took advantage of the little holiday to pay several visits to the cabin in the woods, but they saw no traces of the mysterious man.

"I have something new for you to-day," remarked the manager one morning to the actors and actresses.

"Water scenes?" asked Russ, with a sly glance at Alice.

"No, this is on dry land. You're going to school for a change."

"Going to school!" they all echoed.

"Yes. I've a new play, and some of the scenes take place in a school room. I'll only want the younger ones in this, though. Miss Ruth and Miss 'Alice, Paul and Tommy and Nellie."

"Only the younger ones! Well, I like that!" sniffed Miss Pennington, powdering her nose. "As if we were old maids!"

"The idea!" gasped Miss Dixon. "Those DeVere girls think they are the whole show!"

"I should say they did!"

But it was not the fault of Alice and Ruth that they were young and pretty.

"It won't be a very large class—with just us five in it," remarked Paul.

"Oh, I'm going to use some of the regular school children," said the manager. "I've made arrangements with the teacher. We're to go to the schoolhouse this afternoon. Here are your parts—it's a simple little thing," he added, as he distributed the type-written sheets. "Study 'em a bit, we'll have a little rehearsal, and then we'll film it."

It was not as easy as Mr. Pertell had thought it would be to get the little scenes in the country school. His own players were all right, but the regular school children were either too bashful or too bold—particularly some of the boys. And, just as one side of the room would get quiet, and Russ would be ready to grind out the film, the other side would break out into disorder caused by some mischievous boy.

The children did not really mean to cause trouble, but it was a new thing for them to be made subjects for moving pictures. They would persist in staring straight at the camera, instead of pretending to study their lessons as they should have done.

But finally they were induced to go properly through their little scene, and the action of the play began. At one part Alice was to go to the blackboard to do a sum in arithmetic, and Paul was to pass her a little love note. This was to be intercepted by Ruth, and then the trouble began—trouble of a jealous nature, all being woven into a little country romance that had its start in the schoolhouse.

All was going well, and Russ was clicking merrily away at the camera, when suddenly one of the real pupils—a red-haired boy—cried at the top of his voice:

"Bees! Look out for the bees! There's a swarm of bees headed this way!"

And through the open windows of the school there came a curious humming sound.

CHAPTER XIX

FILMING THE BEES

THERE was an instant scramble on the part of the school children. They made a rush for the door.

"Stop! Keep still — you're spoiling the scene!" cried Mr. Pertell, fairly hopping about in his excitement.

The humming sound came nearer, and there was more haste on the part of the youngsters to leave the schoolroom. The players, on the other hand, seemed to feel no alarm; but there was no use in going on with their parts if the others did not carry out the scene.

"Stop! Stop!" cried the manager. "There's no danger!"

"No danger!" cried the red-haired boy who had given the alarm. "What d'ye call that! Wow!" and he slapped the back of his neck vigorously.

"I'm stung!" he yelled.

"So'm I!" cried a girl near him.

"Me, too!" exclaimed another boy.

The humming sound was much louder now, and several small insects could be seen flying about the room.

"I guess we'd better get out of this!" cried Russ, as he prepared to abandon his camera.

"It would be best," advised the teacher. "There is a swarm of bees outside, and some of them are in here. They may sting all of us."

"Well, this is a new one—a moving picture spoiled by bees!" cried Mr. Pertell. "I never——"

"One got me!" interrupted Mr. Sneed. "I knew something would happen. If there's anything going I get it—from bulldogs to bees!"

He began rubbing vigorously at his cheek, where a bee had saluted him too ardently.

"Come on—everybody out!" ordered Mr. Pertell, making slaps at a bee that was buzzing angrily around his head. There was no need to give this direction to the school children, for they were already outside, and now the teacher hastened out, while the moving picture players lost no time in following her example.

"Ouch! One got me that time!" cried Paul, who was hurrying out at the side of Alice.

"Did it hurt much?" she asked.

"Not much now; but it will more, later," he said, as he examined his wrist to see if the bee's sting had been left in, as that would make an ugly sore. "I've been stung several times before, and when it swells up, and itches, then it's really bad. Let's go find a mud puddle."

"What in the world for?" she asked curiously.

"Mud is the best thing for a bee sting when you can't get ammonia," Paul explained. "Just plaster some mud on, and it draws out the pain. I don't know the theory, except that when a bee stings you he injects some sort of acid poison under the skin. Mud and ammonia are alkalies, and are opposed to acid, so the chemists say."

"Then I'll help you look for a mud puddle," she said.

There was considerable excitement now, for a number of the school children had been stung, and one or two of the players.

"That's the idea—mud!" cried Sandy, as he saw what Paul was doing. "Bring the children over here, Miss Arthur," he said to the pretty school teacher, "and we'll help doctor 'em."

"Oh, thank you," she answered. "Here, children, over this way."

Soon a number of the little tots were gathered about her, and Ruth and Alice, who offered to help doctor their stings. Miss Pennington and

Miss Dixon, who had come to watch the film being made, had, at the first alarm, gone far enough off so that they were in no danger of being stung.

The bees, in a big cloud, were flying slowly about the school, only a comparatively few having entered the window to rout the pupils. Suddenly Russ darted back into the building.

"What are you going to do?" asked Mr. Pertell, who was fretting over the spoiling of the school scene film.

"I'm going to get my camera," he called back over his shoulder. "I'm going to make a film of this. Look, there comes the bee man after his swarm."

Across the field came running several men, and one of them carried a dishpan on which he was vigorously beating with an iron spoon.

Another had a dinner bell which he clanged constantly.

"Great Scott!" cried Mr. Pertell, "What does all this mean?"

"They're trying to make the swarm settle, so they can put 'em back in a hive," explained Sandy. "You see, a swarm of bees is valuable this time of year. There's an old saying, 'a swarm of bees in May is worth a load of hay; a swarm of bees in June is worth a silver spoon; but a swarm in July ain't worth a fly.' That means a swarm in

May will make enough honey to be worth a load of hay, more or less, but in July th' season is so far gone that th' bees won't make more than enough for themselves durin' th' winter."

"I see!" said Mr. Pertell. "Well, I guess Russ has a good idea—we'll get a moving picture of them hiving the swarm. But what do the men make all that noise for?"

"Oh, there's a notion that bees will settle down in a bunch around th' queen, and not fly away if they hear a racket. I don't know whether it's true or not. Some folks spray 'em with water, and that usually fetches 'em."

Meanwhile Russ came out with the camera and began taking pictures of the odd scene. First he got pictures of Ruth, Alice and the teacher applying mud to the stings of the children.

"Well, we'll get a good film out of it, after all,' said Mr. Pertell. "And we can do the school room scene over again after the excitment calms down."

Then Russ began taking pictures of the men making a noise to try and induce the bees to settle. The men themselves seemed to enjoy being filmed. They wore veils of mosquito netting, draped over their broad-brimmed hats, for they approached close to the bees, which were now flying low.

"I'd like to get a near view of these bees," said Russ, "but I don't fancy getting too close. It's no fun to be stung eight or ten times."

"I'll lend you my hat," offered one of the men and, thus protected, Russ moved his camera closer and got a fine view of the swarm of honey-making insects as they alighted on the low branch of an apple tree.

"Git the hive, now, sir!" called another of the men, and while the hive was brought up, to receive the bunch of bees when they should be knocked into it, with their queen, about whom they were clustered, Russ got a fine film of that.

Afterward Sandy explained how bees swarm. A colony of bees will permit but one queen in a hive. Sometimes, when a new one is hatched, the swarm divides, part of the bees going off with the new, or sometimes the old queen, to form a new colony.

This is called "swarming," and the idea is to capture the new swarm, and so increase your number of colonies. Sometimes the bees will go off to the woods, and make a home for themselves in a hollow tree, being thus lost to the keeper. A swarm of bees will make in a season many pounds of honey more than they need to feed themselves during the winter.

Sandy explained how faithful and devoted a

colony of bees is to their queen, which is the bee that lays eggs out of which are hatched drones, or male bees, and the workers. There is a peculiar kind of honey called "queen bread," and sometimes, it is said by some, when a queen bee dies, the workers will select a "cell" containing an egg that will eventually hatch, and surround this egg with queen bread so that when the insect develops enough, it can feed on that instead of on ordinary honey.

This is said to change the character of the insect and make a queen of it to replace the one that has died. Or, if this is not done the queenless colony may merge with another that has a queen.

In order to prevent the hatching of too many queens the bee keeper will examine his hives frequently, and cut out all the "queen cells," thus preventing them from hatching and so causing the bees to swarm frequently.

They all watched while the men shook the cluster of bees into the new hive, and carried them away, Russ, meanwhile getting a fine film of the operation. Later this film was shown with much success in New York, so that, after all, the interruption of the school scene had a happy outcome. Later the little play was finished.

"Whew!" exclaimed Paul, when it was all

over. "That was some going on, all right!"

"Does your sting hurt much?" asked Alice, solicitously.

"I think it would be better for some ammonia," he replied.

"I'll put some on for you when we get back to the house," she offered, "and some witch hazel, too."

"It feels better already—just with the thought of that," he answered gallantly.

CHAPTER XX

THAT MAN

"WELL, ladies and gentlemen, we will now get ready for our big play," announced Manager Pertell to his company of actors and actresses one morning. "It will be the biggest farm drama we have yet attempted. One scene will include the burning of the barn, and the rescue of one of you ladies from the structure."

"Not any of that for mine," remarked Miss Pennington, pertly. "I'm not going to run any chances in a burning building."

"There won't be any chances," returned Mr. Pertell, quietly. "I will have everything arranged in advance so that there will be no danger. That is why I want to start in plenty of time. We will have a number of rehearsals. I am going to have part of the roof of the barn cut away before we start the fire."

"What for?" asked Russ.

"So there will be no danger of anyone getting

caught in the burning structure. The cut-out section can be placed back again, after it is sawed, or chopped out, and it will not show in the picture. But it will be a measure of safety. Now, Russ, you come out with me and we'll figure on the best position to get the pictures, and the best part of the roof to cut away."

"Who's going to be rescued?" asked Miss Dixon. "If it's all the same to you I'd rather not be one of those characters."

"You won't be," replied Mr. Pertell, with a laugh. "I have cast Alice and Ruth for that. There'll be a double rescue scene."

"Oh, I don't know that I can do it very well," said Ruth, quickly, though she did not say she was afraid.

"You can do it all right," declared Mr. Pertell, confidently. "In fact, you won't have to do anything, except allow yourself to be carried down a ladder. You see, you and your sister will pretend to be caught in the burning barn. The only way to get you out is through the roof.

"Paul Ardite, as a farmer's son, goes up a ladder and chops a hole in the roof. But the roof will be sawed away beforehand. You see, I want no delay with you inside the burning structure. Then Paul carries you down the ladder, and Mr. Sneed will rescue Alice.

"That will be fine!" cried Alice, in her lively manner. "I've always wanted to be carried down a ladder. You won't mind; will you, Daddy?" and she appealed to Mr. DeVere.

"Oh, I guess not, if the ladder is good and firm," he replied in his husky voice.

"That's just the point; it won't be!" predicted Mr. Sneed in his usually gloomy manner. "It's bound to break!"

"Comforting; isn't he?" laughed Alice. "I'm not afraid, Mr. Sneed."

"No, but I am," he went on. "I don't want that part, Mr. Pertell."

"You'll have to take it," said the manager, decidedly. "I have no other one I can cast for the part."

"Can't you give it to Mr. Bunn?" asked the "grouch."

"Eh? What's that? Me carry someone from a burning building? Not much!" exclaimed the tragic actor. "I resign right now."

"Well, I must say neither of you is very gallant," laughed Alice. "Paul, I guess you'll have to rescue both of us!"

"I'd be pleased to do it!" he retorted, gaily.

"Oh, I suppose I can manage it," grumbled Mr. Sneed, fairly shamed into taking the part.

"Good!" exclaimed the manager. "Mr. Bunn,

you will be one of the fire-fighters in the bucket brigade. You'll help pass the buckets of water along to put out the fire."

"What? I become a country fireman?" demanded the tall-hatted actor.

"Certainly."

"I refuse! I will take no such part. I cannot lower myself to it."

"Very well," said Mr. Pertell, calmly. "You may resign, but you know what it means—no more engagements."

"Oh, give me the screed," returned the actor, petulantly. "I'll do it!"

Preparations for the rural play went on apace. The barn-burning scene was only one of many, though it was the climax. Rehearsals began and Russ and Mr. Pertell decided on the barn incidents and the place where the roof was to be cut.

A carpenter had been engaged to do this properly, so that it would not show in the moving picture that the roof had been fixed in advance.

In order to have the big play a success Mr. Pertell allowed the players to rehearse leisurely and at considerable length. There was plenty of rest for all. On one afternoon Paul and Russ, when there was nothing to do, paid another visit to the cabin in the woods, to see if there were any signs of the mysterious man. But he was not

there, nor was there any evidence that he had returned to the place. Nor had he been seen about the farm since. He and his dog, if it was his, seemed to have disappeared.

The summer was now passing, and the character of work on the farm changed with the advancing season. Threshing time came, and several good films were obtained of the men at work at the big machine which went from farm to farm to thresh the grain.

Mr. Pertell built a little play about the work, the principal scene in one being where the threshers were at work, and afterward they were shown at dinner in the open air. And such appetites as those men had! A number of Mrs. Apgar's neighbors came over to help her cook, as is usually the case when the threshers come, so altogether some good films were obtained of this phase of rural life.

Getting in the hay was another occasion for making some interesting pictures, and Alice, as she had longed to do, was allowed to ride in on one of the big loads. Afterward, when it was put into the barns she jumped into the soft and fragrant pile of the mow, and was filmed that way, the scene to be used in one of the many rural dramas.

In fact, all sorts of scenes about the farm were

caught on the films, to be used later as plays should develop. The farm animals, too, made up some of the pictures, and the mule which ran away with Mr. Bunn was used for some comic pictures. Mr. Pertell, however, did not ask anyone to ride him, as he wanted no accidents. In fact, it is doubtful if he could have gotten any of his company to try this, even through fear of discharge.

"We'll have a rehearsal of the barn-burning scene to-day," announced Mr. Pertell one morning. "It has gone off pretty well so far, and if there is no hitch to-day we'll film it to-morrow and get the real picture. Everybody ready, now."

"Are we to be carried down the ladders?" asked Ruth, for the former rehearsals had not included this.

"I think so," answered the manager. "The carpenter promised to be here to cut the roof, too, so we may be able to go through the whole scene just as we will in the play. Russ, you come out and watch, and select the best places for your camera, so there will be no hitch to-morrow."

"I hope that ladder will be good and strong," remarked Mr. Sneed. "I wouldn't want it to break with me on it."

"Nor would I," laughed Alice. "Still, that might make a funny picture for you, Mr. Pertell."

"Oh, Alice!" chided Ruth.

"The ladder is all right—it's a new one," said Paul. "I've seen it, and given it a trial. It would even hold Pop Snooks, and he's our heavyweight."

"I made that ladder myself," said the property man.

"I hope it isn't like the imitation fence you made once, that came down with Mr. Switzer," said Ruth.

"Ach, himmel! I hopes not!" exclaimed the German actor. "Dot voult be too bad. It vos bad unough to fall on der fence, but a latter—ach!"

"Don't worry," said Pop. "The ladder will hold an elephant. I have tried it a dozen times."

The moving picture players were gathered about the barn, and the preliminary scenes were rehearsed. The carpenter had come and as soon as he had made the cut in the roof, the more important parts of the play would be gone through with.

The ladder had been tested and found to be perfectly secure, so that any little fear Mr. De

Vere may have had for the safety of his daughters was dispelled.

"Well, now we're ready for the main scene, I think," said Mr. Pertell. "Carpenter, you can get busy while we take a rest."

As Ruth and Alice, with Paul and Russ, were walking off toward a little clump of trees, to sit down in the shade, Alice, glancing across the fields, saw a figure that caused her to cry out:

"That man! That lame man! There he is!"

"And this time he doesn't get away from us!" cried Paul, as he darted toward the mysterious stranger.

CHAPTER XXI

A CHASE

THE unknown interloper pursued his usual tactics. That is, he turned and fled as soon as he saw Paul coming toward him. And he went surprisingly fast for a lame man. Alice was the first to notice this.

"Look!" she cried. "That man limps hardly at all now."

"That's so," agreed Ruth. "Perhaps he only did that as a disguise."

"Excuse me!" called Russ. "I've got to get in on this chase," and he left the two girls, and ran after Paul, who had started ahead of him.

"Oh, please be careful!" cried Ruth, nervously.

"Does that mean Paul—or Russ?" asked Alice, mischievously.

"Both!" said Ruth, with decision. "That man may be a desperate character."

"He doesn't act so," declared Alice, with a laugh. "See, he is running away."

"Yes, but if the boys catch him he may turn on them—and he may—he may have a weapon, Alice."

"Don't be silly, Ruth. Paul and Russ are able to look out for themselves. But how fast that man can run!"

The stranger was indeed making good time across the fields, and Russ and Paul did not seem to be catching up to him very fast. He had had a good start.

The other members of the company had gone in a different direction, and as the chase had started behind the old barn, neither Mr. Pertell nor any of the others could see what was taking place.

"What had we better do?" asked Ruth, with much anxiety.

"I don't see that we can do anything," replied Alice. "We certainly can't join in the pursuit."

"No, but we might tell someone—give an alarm," went on Ruth.

"No," decided Alice, after a moment of thought. "I think Russ and Paul can do better alone. We don't know what that man has done, if anything, and perhaps when the boys catch up to him he may be able to offer a perfectly good explanation. Then, in case we had set others after him, it would not be fair to him. Besides,

if you think there is danger you oughtn't to want any more to share it."

"That is so," agreed Ruth. "Perhaps it will be better to let them try by themselves.

But Paul and Russ evidently were going to have no easy task in capturing the mysterious man. He was running well now, and limping scarcely at all. Either he had feigned it before, or had, in the meanwhile, recovered from his injury.

The two girls watched the chase until a depression in the fields hid the three from sight.

"We'd better go back," suggested Ruth, after a bit.

"Yes," agreed Alice, "but we won't tell the others what has happened."

As it turned out, however, the girls were not able to carry out this intention. For Mr. Pertell had a new idea in regard to some of the scenes, and wanted to consult with Russ about it.

"Where is he?" the manager asked, coming from the farmhouse with a bundle of papers in his hand, after having called a rest period in the barn-burning rehearsals.

"He's after—that man," replied Alice, hesitatingly, and then she told what had happened.

"That man again!" cried Sandy Apgar, who overheard what was said. "He'll not get away this time. I'm goin' after him on a hoss!"

He hurried to the stable, and leaped on the back of one of the lighter farm animals, not even stopping for a saddle.

"Which way was he headed?" he asked the girls.

Ruth and Alice showed him, and Sandy set off over the fields in a strange cross-country run, with a man-hunt at the end of it.

There was nothing for the company of players to do but await the outcome, while the chase was kept up.

Meanwhile, what of Russ, Paul and the mysterious man?

When Paul turned around, after being on the chase for a little time, and saw Russ coming toward him, he stopped to allow the young moving picture operator to come up to him. For he saw that the pursuit was to be a long one, and the man had such a start of him that a few seconds' delay would make no difference.

On and on over the fields went the stranger, until he was headed down a highway.

"When he gets on that it will be easier going," remarked Russ.

"Yes, for both of us," agreed Paul. "I wonder what in the world his game can be, anyhow?"

"We'll find out—if we ever get him," panted

Russ. "Come on! This is going to be 'some run,' as the poets say."

The man gained the highway, and raced along that for some distance. Paul and Russ tried to take a short cut across the field to reach the same road, but they got into a marshy place and sank in, nearly up to their knees.

"He knew this was here!" cried Russ, as he drew himself out of a sticky place.

"He evidently did, and avoided it," agreed his friend. "And we blundered into it—worse luck!"

They had considerable difficulty in reaching the road, and by that time the mysterious man was even further in advance. But they pluckily kept to the chase.

"There he is!" cried Russ, as they came to a turn in the road, and saw a straight stretch before them. "He hasn't gained so very much."

The man was running well, and there seemed to be no return of his lameness.

The neighborhood was a lonely one, and there were no houses in sight. Nor had the young men engaged in the chase met any persons since starting out.

Doggedly they kept on.

"This would make a good picture film!" exclaimed Russ.

"It sure would," agreed Paul. "Only we haven't time to do it. Say, he can run some; can't he?"

"He sure can. Oh, look at that, would you!" cried Russ.

They had now come in sight of a white house, standing back a little from the road. And in front of the house stood an automobile runabout.

What caused Russ to cry out was the sight of the mysterious man leaping into the auto, the engine of which had evidently been left running. In another moment he was off down the road, going at the limit of speed of the machine.

"Well, we might as well give up now," said Paul, coming to a stop. "I'm done up, anyhow."

"Same here," agreed Russ. "That is, unless we can find another auto."

They saw a man run from the farmhouse from in front of which the auto had been so audaciously taken. He was a physician, it appeared.

"The idea! The idea!" he cried. "That perfect stranger ran up and took my auto. Was he a friend of yours?" he asked as Russ and Paul came up. He looked at them suspiciously.

"A friend! No indeed!" exclaimed Paul. "We want to catch him; but we can't do it now."

They heard the sound of hoofbeats in the road behind them, and, turning, they saw Sandy com-

ing along on the farm horse. He had taken a short cut, guessing or hoping that the chase would lead that way.

"Where is he?" cried the young farmer, as he galloped up.

"Gone!" replied Paul.

"In an auto," added Russ.

"My auto," corrected the doctor. "The impertinent chap had the nerve to take my machine, and I need it, too."

"I'll get him!" cried Sandy, as he clapped his heels to the side of his panting horse.

"You can never get him while he's in that machine!" called Paul.

"Maybe the auto will have a break-down!" the young farmer answered over his shoulder. "Such things have happened."

"Indeed they have—to me often enough," remarked the doctor. "I have had more break-downs in that car than I like to remember. But just when we want one, so we may be able to catch that scoundrel, it may not happen."

"If Mr. Sneed was here he'd be sure to cause something to happen," remarked Russ, jokingly. Sandy galloped on down the road after the mysterious man in the automobile he had so daringly taken.

CHAPTER XXII

CAUGHT

THERE was considerable excitment about Oak Farm when Russ and Paul returned from their unsuccessful chase after the mysterious man, leaving Sandy to continue the hunt. All the players, and a number of the hired men, were discussing the occurrence, and eagerly questioning Ruth and Alice as to what they knew and had seen. This was little enough, however.

When Russ and Paul came up, still breathing hard after their run, they added what they knew.

"Vy shouldn't ve make ourselves yet into a committee und all go after him?" asked Mr. Switzer. "Dot feller ought to be caught."

"That's true enough," agreed Mr. Pertell; "but we're here to make moving pictures, and we can't do it if the whole company chases after that fellow."

"Besides, something might happen," remarked Mr. Sneed, gloomily. "He might have a gun and shoot us."

"Then I'm glad you girls didn't keep on after him," said Mr. DeVere in his hoarse voice. "I wish you would take no further part in this affair, Ruth and Alice," and he spoke earnestly.

"Don't worry, Daddy," laughed Alice. "I'm sure, after all, that the man isn't dangerous. He wouldn't hurt us, that's certain, for he loaned us the use of his cabin, and he was very polite about it."

"He doesn't seem to care about us," added Ruth. "For he runs every time he sees us. Is there anything peculiar about us?"

"Yes," said Russ, "there is."

"What?"

"I'll tell you—some other time," he informed her, and Ruth grew rosy red.

"Well, I suppose we could go on with the barn-burning scene, said Mr. Pertell, when the chase had been discussed in all its phases. "I did want Sandy on hand, though, as representing his father, the owner of the farm, in case anything happens."

"I won't own the farm much longer," said Felix Apgar sadly. "The sale will come off next week, and then I s'pose we'll be turned out bag and baggage, Mother."

"Oh, Pa, I hate to hear you talk that way," she said, as she put her trembling hand in his.

The old couple made a pathetic picture as they stood together on the porch of the white house—the house that had been their home so many years, but out of which they were soon to be turned by a cruel shift of fate.

"Cheer up!" said Pop Snooks, who had a leisure hour. "It's always darkest just before dawn, you know. Something may happen to save the farm for you."

"I'm too old to believe in miracles," replied Mr. Apgar, with a shake of his head. "Come on in the house, Mother, and we'll begin to pack. They can't take our things from us, anyhow, though where we'll go the Lord only knows."

"Why, you won't have to move out, even after the mortgage was foreclosed," said Alice, as she slipped her arm about the waist of the trembling old lady. "I heard the sheriff say you could stay on for some time yet."

"I know, dearie, but it wouldn't be *our* farm, and Pa and me wouldn't feel like stayin' when Squire Bladsell owns it. It would be like livin' on charity. No, we'll go as soon as the sale is over. But you're a dear, good girl to try and help us."

"They have helped us a lot, Mother—all of 'em!" exclaimed Mr. Apgar. "You movin' picture folks have been real kind to us, and the

money you paid for the use of the farm come in mighty handy, seein' that some of the crops wasn't over and above good. Yes, we'll never forget you—never."

He and his wife turned into the house, and the hired men went about their tasks.

"I suppose we'll have to wait until Sandy comes back," spoke Mr. Pertell. "I don't want to set the barn afire until he's here. For, not only do I want him on hand, as I said, to represent his father, but I'm depending on him to lead his men, and some of the others, in an attempt to put out the fire. I want plenty of action in this scene. So we'll wait."

"I wonder what has happened to him?" mused Ruth. But no one knew.

The carpenter Mr. Pertell had hired to cut away part of the roof asked if he should set about his task.

"No, I think we'll wait until Sandy comes back," replied the manager. "You can get all ready, though. Russ, I suppose your camera is in shape?"

"Oh, yes. In fact I've got two—one for emergencies."

"That's good. Plenty of film on hand?"

"All we'll need, I think."

"Well, then, the only thing to do is to wait.'

Meanwhile Sandy was keeping on after the daring and mysterious fugitive. Fortunately for the young farmer his horse was a comparatively fleet one, or he would have lost sight of the auto soon after the strange race began. As it was he managed to keep the doctor's car in sight for a considerable distance.

And then, so suddenly that it seemed like a trick of fate, something occurred which completely turned the tables in favor of Sandy. The fleeing man in the auto found himself behind a load of hay, that occupied a considerable part of the road. Sandy was close enough to hear the frantic tooting of the horn, but either the driver of the hay wagon did not hear, or he had a constitutional objection to autoists, for he did not pull out.

Thus the strange man was obliged to turn to one side and, unluckily for him, but luckily for Sandy, there was a roadside ditch at that point. Into this the wheels of the auto went and as it was sticky and soft the car came to such a sudden stop that the man was pitched out over the glass wind-shield, landing in the ditch.

"Now I've got you!" cried Sandy, and clapping his heels to the sides of his panting horse the young farmer rode up alongside the prostrate man.

"I've got you! Surrender!" commanded the young farmer, leaping down, and grabbing the man, who was now sitting up a dazed look on his face. "I've got you, and I arrest you in th' name of th' law!"

"Yes, I see you've got me," replied the man, slowly. "But on what charge do you arrest me?"

Sandy was puzzled for a moment, and scratched his head. He had not thought of this.

"You have no right to arrest me," the man went on. "I have done nothing to you."

"I don't know whether you have or not," Sandy said. "I think you've been tryin' to, but couldn't do it. I'm suspicious of you. That's it—I arrest you on suspicion!"

"That's no charge," cried the man, struggling to his feet and trying to break away. But Sandy held him firmly. "Besides, you are not an officer, and have no warrant."

"I don't need any!" cried Sandy, who had that point clear enough in his mind. "Any citizen of the United States can make an arrest if he wants to, and I'm a citizen. So I arrest you, whatever your name is, on suspicion."

"Suspicion of what?"

Again Sandy was puzzled.

"I don't just know," he confessed. "I'll leave

that to Squire Blasdell. He's th' law-court around here—and he's a hard one, too. I'll take you afore him. So come along. You've been trespassin' on our place, anyhow, and I can make that a charge if I can't any other. Come along."

Sandy was young, strong and vigorous, and the man, though almost his equal, was tired out from his long run before he had taken to the auto. Besides he was badly jolted up by the sudden and unceremonious manner in which he left the car.

"All right, I s'pose I've got to come," the man admitted in a sullen manner.

"You'd better," observed Sandy grimly. "And there's another charge, too. You took th' doctor's automobile."

To this the man answered nothing. He probably knew that this was a serious enough charge on which to hold him.

"We'll jest go back in th' car, too," went on Sandy, "since you know how to run 'em. But, mind you! No monkey tricks! Don't you try to run away with me."

"All right—get in," said the man, shortly. "I'll see if I can get her out of the ditch. You wouldn't have gotten me if that man with the hay had given me my share of the road."

"Maybe not," admitted Sandy, grimly, "but I *have* got you, jest th' same. Come on."

Sandy left his horse cropping the grass at the roadside, and got into the auto with his prisoner. After a few attempts, the machine was gotten out of the ditch, and the start back was begun. Sandy saw a farmer whom he knew, and asked him if he would bring the horse back to Oak Farm.

"And now we'll 'tend to your case," the young farmer remarked to the man in the auto. "I don't believe you told me what your name was," he added significantly.

"No, I didn't, and I don't intend to," snapped the stranger. "You can find out any way you like."

"Oh, we'll find out, all right," Sandy returned "Drive on."

The man did not speak as he drove the car forward. They reached the house where the physician had been, and found him waiting; a very angry medical man indeed.

"So you got him; eh?" he called to Sandy.

"That's what I did. And I'd like to borrow your car to take him to jail, if you don't mind."

"I don't mind a bit, and I'll go along to lodge a charge against him. There's a state law against anyone taking another person's automobile with-

out permission. Who is he, anyhow, Sandy?"

"I don't know, and he won't tell."

The man maintained a sullen silence during the remainder of the trip, and when the office of Squire Blasdell was reached he was led inside by Sandy.

"I've got a prisoner here for you, Squire," announced the young farmer. "I don't know what his name is, and I don't exactly know what charge we can make against him. But he's been hanging around Oak Farm for some time, and he runs whenever anyone comes near him, and if that ain't suspicion I don't know what is."

"You're right there, Sandy," said the squire, who, in spite of the fact that he was about to foreclose on Oak Farm, was not on bad terms with the Apgars. The truth of the matter was that the squire only acted as agent for others whose money he put out on mortgages. Personally he was sorry for the Apgars.

"Now then, Mister whatever-your-name-is," began the squire, "what about you?"

"I'll tell you nothing," said the man. "You have no right to hold me."

"He took my auto," broke in the doctor.

"Then we'll hold him on that charge, and we'll call him John Doe," decided the squire. "Maybe he'll change his tune after a bit. Lock him up,"

he ordered the constable in charge, and the mysterious man, as mysterious as ever, was led away.

"I'd like to ask one favor," he declared, halting a minute.

"You can ask, but I don't know as we'll grant it," spoke the squire.

"I've left a dog up in the old cabin," the man went on. "I guess you know the place," he said to Sandy. "It's the cabin where the girls took shelter from the rain. There's a dog tied there and he might starve to death. I wish you'd feed him."

"I'll do that," responded Sandy, quickly. "I'll look after him, too. He's entitled to some consideration, even if you ain't."

The man said nothing.

"Is it your dog?" asked the squire.

"I—I found him," answered the man, hesitatingly, "and he likes me. I wouldn't want to see him starve."

"He shan't!" promised Sandy.

Then, as the queer character was locked up, Sandy started back for Oak Farm, puzzling over the mysterious man and his object.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE MONEY BOX

"WHAT did he say?"

"Who was he?"

"What was his object?"

These, and a dozen other questions like them, were showered on Sandy Apgar when he arrived at the farm, some little time later, after having seen the mysterious man safely locked up in the town jail.

"Now there's no use askin' me who he is, or what he wants," declared the young farmer. "All I know is that I caught him. He won't talk."

"You did a good piece of work," declared Mr. Pertell, "and a day or so of jail food may make the fellow change his mind. Well, it's too late to do any moving pictures to-day. We'll put off the barn-burning until to-morrow."

"Well, there's one thing we can't put off until to-morrow and that is looking after that dog,"

remarked Sandy. "The poor fellow may be frantic by now."

"May we go with you?" asked Alice.

"Surely," answered Sandy.

"Come along, Ruth—and anybody else who wants to," she added.

"Count me in!" exclaimed Paul.

"The same here," laughed Russ.

So the five set off for the lonely cabin.

"I can't understand how the dog came to be there, though," mused Russ, as they walked on through the woods. "That fellow wasn't at the cabin the last time we looked."

"But that was several days ago," Paul reminded him. "He may have been staying there ever since, thinking we had given up going there. That's very likely it."

And this proved to be the case. The man had apparently moved back into the cabin. The room was arranged about as it had been the day the girls took shelter in the place, but there was this change—that a fine collie dog was chained near the big fireplace.

And if ever a dog was glad to see anyone it was that same collie. He jumped about, barking joyfully, but was held back by a strong chain, fastened to his collar.

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed Sandy kindly, and

the dog wagged his tail in friendly greeting.

"Oh, I wish we could keep him!" exclaimed Alice, who loved animals.

"I guess we'll have to—until that feller gits out of jail," spoke the young farmer. "They won't allow no animals in the lockup. We'll take him to the farm."

The dog made friends at once, and seemed particularly fond of Alice. She was patting him, when she happened to turn his collar around. A brass plate came into view and as the girl read something on it she uttered a cry of surprise.

"Look!" she exclaimed. "This is the lost dog!"

"What lost dog?" asked Russ.

"Don't you remember—the one Mrs. Delamont lost when we were in the wreck, coming up here. See, there is his name—Rex III. We have found him for her. How glad she will be!"

"You're right!" exclaimed Paul, after examining the collar. "Here are the initials 'H. A. D.' Weren't those hers?" he asked of Ruth.

"Yes, I have her name and address," replied the girl. "We must send her word at once."

"I don't understand how the man got the dog," observed Russ.

"He might have been at the scene of the wreck, and when he saw the chance he slipped into the

baggage car and took Rex," explained Paul. "I suppose he'll tell about that, if he ever confesses. It's a queer business all around."

The fine dog seemed to like his new friends, and skipped and frisked about them as they went back to Oak Farm. And there the dog made his home, though it would not be for long, since Mrs. Delamont would be sure to send for her prize pet when she learned where he was.

"Oh, but I shall hate to let you go!" cried Alice, as she put her arms about the neck of Rex.

"Well, I hope there won't be no more interruptions or delays," remarked Mr. Pertell the next day. "We must get that barn-burning film sure, for I have some other plans to carry out, with winter coming on."

"You don't mean to say you're going to keep on in this moving picture business all winter, do you?" asked Mr. Sneed.

"I certainly do," remarked the manager.

"Well, all I've got to say is that we'll freeze to death," went on the "grouch" in gloomy tones. "You can count me out of it," he added. "I'm not going to freeze for anybody."

"No one asked you to," replied the manager. "Come now, everyone get ready for the fire scene. We'll go over it once more, to be sure

we're all right for the final. The roof will be cut and then we'll touch off the place.

"Sandy, see to it that there are plenty of pails of water for the bucket brigade. Mr. Bunn, you're to be one of that crowd, you remember."

"Yes," responded the actor, with a heavy sigh. "I suppose I must lower my art to the level of the movies. Oh, why did I ever get into this wretched business?"

Ruth, Alice and the others went out to the old barn. All was in readiness for the big scene. The ladder for the rescue of the moving picture girls was in readiness, and Paul and Mr. Sneed made sure that it was safe.

"Now then, carpenter, up on the roof with you, and cut out that section so there won't be any doubt but what it will come loose readily when Paul chops at it with his axe," ordered the manager.

The carpenter began his work. He ascended to the roof by the ladder, and was soon cutting and sawing away. The others watched him, half idly, little prepared for the dramatic scene that was to follow. Mr. and Mrs. Apgar had come out to witness the making of the fire film.

"I'll sort of hate to see the old barn go, useless as it is," said the farmer. "It was one of the first buildin's on the farm, and Uncle Isaac

used to be terrible fond of stayin' out here. In fact before he died he spent a lot of time out here after th' accident, sittin' all by himself, and sometimes talking a lot of nonsense. His mind was goin' then, I reckon, only none of us knowed it. Yes, poor Uncle Isaac was terrible fond of this old barn, and I sure will hate to see it go up in smoke."

"I wish Uncle Isaac had been fonder of business, an' had left some word where his money went—and ours, too," observed Sandy. "I don't want to blame him for what he couldn't help, but it sure is hard for us!"

The carpenter was chopping away, taking off a section of the roof, to afford easy egress for Ruth and Alice when the time should come. Suddenly he uttered a cry of surprise.

"What's the matter—cut yourself?" called Sandy.

"No, but I've cut into something queer. Better come up here and see what it is—I don't want to touch it."

"I hope it isn't a hornet's nest!" exclaimed Sandy.

"No, it isn't that."

The others wondered what the queer find might be, as Sandy and Russ hurried up the ladder.

As they reached the roof, which at this point

was nearly flat, they saw that the carpenter, in taking off a section, had uncovered what proved to be a small secret room. It was built into the barn in such a manner, between false walls, that its existence had never in the past been suspected.

It was a small place, just large enough to contain a table and a chair, and there were no openings or windows on the sides. It must have been a dark place, but there was an old lantern on the table, showing that the occupant, whoever he had been, was not left in the gloom.

But there was something else on the table besides the lantern. This was a large tin box, the sort that valuable papers are usually kept in, and at the sight of it, as Sandy gazed down into the secret room, through the hole in the roof, the young farmer cried:

"There it is! There's Uncle Isaac's money box! The lost is found, and now, if there's only the money and papers in it we'll not lose our farm after all! The Lord be praised! If only the money is there!"

"You can soon tell!" remarked Russ. "Drop down in there and take a look."

"What is it? What have you found?" called Mr. Pertell from the ground. "We want to get the pictures."

"Wait a minute!" Sandy begged. "We've found——"

"Wait, don't tell them yet," suggested Russ. "It won't do to raise the hopes of the old people, and then disappoint them. The box may be empty."

"That's right," agreed Sandy. "I'll soon know, though." He hung by his hands to the edge of the opening, and then dropped down into the secret room, so strangely revealed.

"The box is locked!" he cried.

"Here's my hatchet—break it open," suggested the carpenter.

"Guess I might as well—no telling where the key would be," said Sandy. With the hatchet he soon had lifted the cover of the box. Then he gave a joyful cry.

"It's here!" he shouted. "It was Uncle Isaac's box, all right, and the money's here—quite a lot of it, and some valuable papers worth more. Hurray! The farm is saved, after all! Tell pop and mom!"

"No, we'll let you tell them," said Russ. "Come and tell them yourself."

"How'm I goin' t' git up?" asked Sandy, trembling with excitement and new hope, as he fingered the dusty bills that would mean so much to him and his parents.

"Here's a rope," suggested the carpenter, for he had been using one at his work. "We'll drop it down to you, and you can tie it to the box. Then you can come up on the rope yourself."

This was soon done, and a little later Sandy was standing beside his aged parents, showing them the find.

"It's money—real money!" he cried. "The money Uncle Isaac owes us. Now we can pay off the mortgage on the farm. You won't have t' move off th' farm!—Pop—Mom! You can stay here!"

"Praise the Lord!" cried the farmer, reverently. "My prayer has been granted; I can die on the old place!"

"Why, Pa, don't talk about dyin' now!" protested Mrs. Apgar, through her tears. "We're goin' t' live—live on th' old place!"

"That's what we be!" he cried.

A close examination of the contents of the box disclosed the fact that it contained considerable wealth. There were some bonds and stocks, as well as a large sum in cash. At least five thousand dollars of this belonged to the Apgars, representing the loan they had made to Uncle Isaac. And as he left no other heirs, eventually the entire wealth would come to the farmer.

"This has been a lucky day for us!" exclaimed

Sandy, as he put the wealth in a secure place in the house.

"Well, it will be an unlucky one for us, if we don't get this fire film," remarked Mr. Pertell, half humorously.

"Just so," returned Russ.

There was much discussion over the find, and then an examination was made of the secret room. From within the sliding panel door, by which entrance was gained, could easily be seen. But outside, it was so well hidden that it is doubtful if anyone but one who knew the trick could have found it.

Mr. Apgar recalled that the barn stood on the farm when he had purchased the estate years before. It had belonged to an eccentric man, and there was little doubt that he had built the secret room for his own use—though what it was could only be guessed.

"And Uncle Isaac must have discovered the hidden door when he was out here in the barn so much," said Sandy. "Lunatics are cunning, sometimes, I've heard. He probably found th' place and kept it to himself, as a good place to hide his valuables.

"That's why he spent so much time out here. I used to wonder sometimes, at having him appear from inside the old barn, when I never sus-

pected he was on hand. He was in this room, all right."

"It certainly was a good hiding place," agreed Mr. Pertell. "It was lucky he did not shut himself up and die in here, or you would never have known where to look for him. He must have left his money box here one day, closed the place up and then came his unfortunate loss of mind, after he was hurt. He forgot all about where he had left the wealth, and of course he couldn't tell anyone. Well, I'm glad you've got it back."

"So am I!" chuckled Sandy. "Now if we only had some explanation as to why that queer chap was always hanging about this farm we'd be all right."

"Maybe he knew your Uncle Isaac," suggested Ruth.

"No, that man's a stranger around here," declared Sandy.

After some little further talk about the queer find, Mr. Pertell again suggested that the taking of the picture be resumed.

Sandy seemed to hang back and the manager asked him:

"Do you want to give up your part in it, now that you have your money again? Don't you want the barn burned?"

"Oh, yes; it ain't that!" the young farmer hastened to assure the manager. "It's a good thing we didn't burn the barn before we found the money. I was only wishin' I could send word of it to Squire Blasdell, so he could call off the foreclosure. I hate to see them signs up."

"Then you go and tell him the good news," suggested the manager, generously. "We've had so many delays on this thing that a little more won't hurt. Go tell the squire."

So Sandy went off, and the players had an unexpected rest.

CHAPTER XXIV

EXPLANATIONS

SANDY found Squire Blasdell having an interview with the strange prisoner.

"I'm putting him on the grill, and trying to find out something about him, but it's hard work," the Squire said to the young farmer.

"Yes, you might as well save your time," spoke the man. "I'll tell you nothing!"

"I've got news for you, Squire," said Sandy, a little later when the constable had been called in to take the stranger back to his cell.

"Looks like good news, by your face, Sandy," the lawyer replied. "You haven't been finding money for the mortgage; have you?"

"That's just what I have, Squire!" Sandy cried. "We just found Uncle Isaac's money box!"

"You did! 'Gosh all Hemlock' as the boys used to say. How was it?"

"We found the money box—with a lot of

cash and papers in a secret room in the old barn we're goin' to burn for movin' pictures. We found the money box, all right."

There was a sound from the room where the prisoner sat. He started to his feet, and stepped to the grating which separated the cell from the apartment in which Sandy and the Squire were.

"You say you found Isaac Apgar's hidden wealth?" he asked.

"Yes—but what is that to you?" inquired the Squire.

"A lot to me. The game is up now, and I'll confess everything. I've been keeping still, hoping I could get out and find that box myself. That's what my object has been in hanging around your farm," he went on. "I was looking for that box myself. I—I thought maybe I might get a reward if I located it."

This statement might be doubtful, but there was no way of disproving it. The man might have been hoping only for a reward; but, on the other hand, if he had found the wealth he might have kept it all for himself.

"How did you come to know about this?" asked Squire Blasdell, curiously. "Did you ever know Isaac Apgar?"

"Well, I don't know as you could exactly call it 'knowing' him," was the slow answer, "see-

ing that he didn't know anybody himself, of late years. I may as well tell you the whole story. My name is Monk Freck, and I used to be a keeper in the state lunatic asylum where Isaac Apgar was confined. That's how I knew him. I was his keeper!"

This was strange and startling news, but it explained many things.

"Go on," urged the Squire. "What about looking for his money?"

"That's it," added Sandy.

"I'll come to that. Though few folks knew it, Mr. Apgar had some lucid moments during his insanity. He was as right as anyone at times, but maybe only for a half hour or so at a stretch. And it was in those times that he'd talk about the wealth he had hidden.

"I tried to get him to tell me just where it was, for I had heard rumors that he had hidden quite a pile before he went crazy. But he was either too cunning to tell me, or his mind failed him at the critical moment. All I could learn was that it was hidden somewhere about the corner of the old barn on the Apgar place.

"Well, he kept on getting worse until he died, and I made up my mind to have a try for the money box. I gave up my job in the asylum, and came here. And since then I've been looking

around, trying to make the discovery, and claim a reward.

"I spent a good deal of time in the barn, but I never thought there could be a secret room. I thought it might be buried somewhere around the place. I didn't have much chance to hunt, though, after the moving picture people got here," he added.

"And was it you who made the queer noises in the barn, and scared the girls?" asked Sandy.

"It was. I didn't mean to scare 'em, though. I was trying to crawl up between two beams one day, when I slipped and fell. I rattled some loose boards where I had lifted some up to have a place to hide. I hurt myself, too, and I guess I groaned. The fall made me lame for a while."

"That accounts for your limp," said Sandy. "How did you come to go to the cabin?"

"Oh, I wanted some place to stay near your barn, and as no one used the cabin, I took up my quarters there. Before that I often used to sleep in a secret place in your old barn. But I didn't mean any harm. Of course I didn't want it known who I was, for if it was learned that I had been Mr. Apgar's keeper in the asylum everybody would have guessed my object. So I ran whenever I saw anybody from Oak Farm. But you finally caught me. I'm not sorry, for I was getting

tired of the game. And so you found the hidden box? Well, I wish it could have been me."

"Did you steal that dog, too?' asked Sandy.

"No, I did not. I found him wandering about and took a notion to him. I guess maybe he had been stolen, but I didn't do it. If I had known who he belonged to I might have got a reward from them."

"The owner is known," Sandy said, "and she may reward you. I feel so happy that I don't wish anybody bad luck. Now Squire, I suppose the foreclosure is off; ain't it? I've got more than the four thousand dollars."

"The old farm is safe, Sandy," the Squire answered, "and I'm glad of it, for your sake. You may have thought me hard and grasping, but I had to do the business for my clients. Now we'll have to decide what to do with this man. I reckon we can let him go, seeing that he didn't really do anything except take the auto, and I guess the doctor won't press that charge."

This proved to be the case, and that day Monk Freck was released. Mrs. Delamont was to overjoyed to get her dog back that she gave Freck a substantial reward, for the former asylum keeper had been kind to Rex III, and insisted that he had found him after the dog had gotten away from the real thief.

CHAPTER XXV

THE FIRE FILM

"ALL ready now, Russ!"

"All ready, Mr. Pertell."

"Then start off. Be ready with the torch there, Sandy, and touch off the pile of hay and straw inside the barn when I give the word. Then come out for the bucket brigade."

"Yes, sir."

It was the day after the finding of the money box, for there had been so much excitement attending that eposide, that Mr. Pertell thought it wise to postpone the fire scene. But now all was in readiness for it.

"All ready now!" called the manager, and the play began. There were several preliminary scenes before the final one of the burning barn, and these were successfully run off, Russ filming them one after the other.

There was no hitch, so well had the play been rehearsed. Now came the time when Ruth and

Alice were to take refuge in the barn, the action being supposed to occur after a chase when they wished to escape from a rascally guardian.

The firing of the barn (in the play) was supposed to be done by an enemy of the farmer, and was not done to entrap the girls, of whose presence the incendiary supposedly knew nothing.

But the girls were locked in the barn when the fire broke out, and necessarily must be rescued.

"Touch her off!" cried the manager at the proper point, and Sandy set fire to a pile of hay and straw inside the barn. This would make considerable smoke, and smoke always shows up well in moving pictures.

"Get ready with the water now!" called Mr. Pertell. "I want a lively bucket brigade scene here!"

Sandy and his force, of whom Wellington Bunn was one, ran back and forth from the water barrel, carrying the filled buckets and splashing the contents on the flames.

The fire was now at its height.

"All ready for the rescue!" ordered the manager. "Up with the ladder and get after the girls, Paul. Mr. Sneed, you're in on this."

Up the ladder climbed Paul, and with an axe he began chopping away at the roof. This was the place prepared beforehand, and Ruth and

Alice were to be drawn up through the hole that went down into the secret room where the money box had been found.

"Quick!" cried Paul, as he made the splinters fly. This was only for the effect, as the section on the roof was all ready to come away. "Hurry up, Sneed!" called the young fellow. "It's getting pretty hot here. We'll have to follow each other closely down the ladder."

"We can't get away from here any too soon for me," the other answered. "This is the worst yet."

In another moment the secret room was exposed. Ruth and Alice were in it, a little afraid, after all, that something might happen.

"Come on!" cried Paul reaching down his hands. Alice climbed up on a chair in the room, and Paul lifted her out on the roof. Then Mr. Sneed did the same for Ruth.

Putting the girls over their shoulders, in the manner in which firemen make rescues, the two started down the ladder.

In spite of Mr. Sneed's fear, nothing happened. The rescue went off finely, and even those not taking part in it applauded as it came to a close and Ruth and Alice, who were supposed to have fainted, were revived.

Then their parts ended, for that particular

scene, but the barn continued to burn, as was intended, and soon it was a glowing heap of embers and ashes. The work of the bucket brigade had not been successful, nor had it been intended that it should be.

The final scenes of the play—away from the fire—were made, and then the players could rest.

"I hope it's a success," said the manager, with a sigh. "We have worked hard enough over it."

And a few days later word came back from New York, whither the film had been sent, that it was a great success, and one of the best dramas the Comet Company had ever put over. The scenes where Alice and Ruth were rescued were particularly fine.

"Well, I wonder what sort of 'stunts' we'll have to do next, Ruth?" remarked Alice as they were in their room in the old farm house one morning, about a week after the barn fire.

"There is no telling," was the answer. "Mr. Pertell has some plans, but I don't believe they are ready yet."

"Yes they are, my dears!" exclaimed Mr. DeVere, as he entered the room. "We have just received word that the entire company will spend some months in the backwoods, getting pictures of winter scenes."

"Oh, the woods in winter!" cried Alice. "I'll just love that; won't you, Ruth?"

"I think I shall. But I do hope we won't have so much excitement as we've had here."

Whether they did or did not may be learned by reading the next volume of this series, to be called: "The Moving Picture Girls Snowbound; Or, the Proof on the Film."

Happy days followed at Oak Farm, for after the hard work of the season Mr. Pertell decided to give his company a little vacation. And the Apgars were happy, too, for the foreclosure preceedings were stopped by the satisfying of the mortgage with Uncle Isaac's money.

Mrs. Delamont sent on for Rex III, and Alice bade the fine animal good-bye rather sadly, for she had grown very fond of him.

"Come on," said Paul to her one day, "we'll take a walk, and maybe we can find another dog."

"Not like Rex, though," laughed Alice, as she set off with the young fellow. And now, for a time, we will take leave of the Moving Picture Girls.

THE END